Waves for Change: the role of the South Tarawa-based women's interests program in the decolonisation process of the Gilbert Islands

SAMANTHA ROSE
BA (Hons), Queensland University of Technology (QUT)

Submitted in full requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Division of Research and Commercialisation
Queensland University of Technology
Research Students Centre

January 2014

KEYWORDS

History; women; decolonisation; Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (GEIC); Kiribati; Tuvalu; women's clubs; women's interests; border-dweller; Church-based women's clubs; women's fellowships; indigenisation; gender; custom; Pacific women; community workers

ABSTRACT

Histories of the Republic of Kiribati (formerly the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (GEIC)) have failed to fully acknowledge the pivotal role women played individually, as well as collectively through the phenomenon of women's clubs, in preparing the Colony for independence. In the late 1950s, and in anticipation of the eventual decolonisation of Pacific territories, humanitarian developments within the South Pacific Commission (SPC) called for women's interests to be recognised on the regional Pacific agenda. The British Colonial administration, a founding member of the SPC, took active steps to implement a formalised women's interests program in the GEIC. Acknowledging that women were to have a legitimate role in the new independent nation, albeit restricted to that of the domestic sphere and at the village level, the British Colonial administration, under the leadership of Resident Commissioner VJ Andersen, initiated strategies aimed at building the capacity of organisational structures, personnel, training, networks and communication for community betterment. The strategy focussed on the informal adult education of village women through the creation of a national network of village-based women's clubs.

Focusing on the experience of Gilbertese women, this thesis provides a history of the development of the women's interests program in the GEIC through an analysis of three successive waves of female leadership within the movement. The thesis argues the development of the women's interests movement as an overlapping progression of through three key phases - from border-dweller women advocating for change in the early 1960s, to SPC-trained community workers providing informal adult education to village women, to the reassertion of women's Church-based groups by the late 1970s.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF IMAGES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACWW	Associated Country Women of the World
AMAK	*Aia Maea Ainen Kiribati*
CETC	Community Education and Training Centre
EBS	Elaine Bernacchi School for Girls
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations
FSP	The Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific
GEIC	Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony
GIPC	Gilbert Islands Protestant Church
IWD	International Women's Day
KNLA	Kiribati National Library and Archives
KPC	Kiribati Protestant Church
LMS	London Missionary Society
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
NCW	National Council of Women
OLSH	Order of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart
OXFAM	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
PACFAW	Pacific Foundation for the Advancement of Women
RAK	*Reitan Aine Kamatu*
SPC	South Pacific Commission
TTC	Tarawa Teacher's College
UN	United Nations

UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UPNG	University of Papua New Guinea
USP	University of the South Pacific
WHO	World Health Organisation
WIW	Women's Interests Worker
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

GLOSSARY OF I-KIRIBATI TERMS

aine	woman
Aia Maea Ainen Kiribati	'women's ring of friendship'; name given to the National Federation of Women
anene	song
baibai	root vegetable, similar to taro
i-matang	foreigner, typically of European descent
I-Tangaru	I-Kiribati people
Irekenrao	'adopted sister'; name given to Island Associations of Homemakers' Clubs
kamaimai	coconut toddy syrup
ko rabwa	thank you
maneaba	meeting house, also refers to traditional decision making process
mauri	welcome greeting
mwane	man
mwaie	Kiribati dance
Nareau	creator of Kiribati
Nei	Mrs/Ms
Nei Nibarara	'the woman married to the moon' in Kiribati mythology; also name given to the joint Catholic and Protestant women's handicraft group in 2005

Reitan Aine Kamatu	*Reita* meaning 'to connect or to join', *Aine* meaning 'women'; name given to the Federation of Protestant Women
Teitoingaina	'morning star'; also name given to the Federation of Catholic Women
Ten	Mr
te bwere	tool for making pandanus mats
tibuta	traditional blouse
uniaine	old woman
unimwane	old man

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: QUT Verified Signature

Date: 8 January 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to my aunt, Dr Helen Williams and supervisor, Dr Max Quanchi whom, without their belief in me, this thesis would not have been possible.

Thank you to my family and friends for your love and patience, especially to my husband Patrick Fritz.

To the former Humanities staff of the Queensland University of Technology, Carseldine Campus, thank you for nurturing my love of learning and of the discipline of history - A/Prof Gary Ianziti, Dr John Ainsworth, A/Prof Jane Williamson and Dr Catherine Dewhirst.

To my colleagues and friends at the University of Southern Queensland, thank you for your understanding and humour during this process. Special thanks to Dr Lindsay Henderson and Dr Marcus Harmes for feedback on initial drafts.

I must acknowledge the significant contribution of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Pacific Studies (AAAPS) and the Pacific History Association (PHA) in shaping my understanding of the Pacific, its history and people and for providing such thoughtful support and opportunities for postgraduate students.

I am grateful for the financial support I received from the Queensland University of Technology through scholarships and awards as well as fieldwork and conference grants. Thank you to Melody McIntosh for her administrative support.

Special thanks to Nei Tekarei, Nei Terubetake, Nei Rita, Nei Anne, Nei Claire, Nei Meere, Nei Katherine, Nei Moia, Nei Teetang, Dianne Goodwillie, Nei Tebi, Nei Tamwara, Nei Katimira, Nei Aroita, Bishop Mea, Sister Alaima, Sister Margaret, Sister Katarina and Sister Frances. Thank you also to the staff at the Kiribati National Library and Archives, Kiribati Cultural Centre, and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Archives as well as the CETC and SPC archives in Fiji.

Thank you to the women of AMAK, the RAK and *Teitoingaina*. I promise to wear my *tibuta* with pride and continue practicing my *mwaie*.

To my dear friends Nei Mee, Nei Katimira, Nei Aroita and Nei Tanaeang – may you rest in peace.

To the women of Kiribati, *kam rabwa*. I sincerely hope that this research, in some small way, honours the memory of your service to the nation of Kiribati.

Te mauri, te raoi, ao te tabomoa.

Image 1: Author with members of the National Council of Women and AMAK staff, March 2009

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis provides a history of the decolonisation process that positions women as active agents of change. It traces the historical development of the national women's interests program in the Republic of Kiribati (formerly of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (GEIC)) through three conceptual waves of women.[1][2] This study primarily focuses on the development of the women's interests program as it emerged from urban Tarawa. In earlier research for an honours dissertation I analysed the role of Kanak women in the decolonisation process of Kanaky/New Caledonia.[3] In particular, I offered an examination of the contribution of female activist Dewey Gorodey through an analysis of her short fiction and poetry. This project revealed that, despite being neglected in the historiography of decolonisation in the Pacific, women were active in these processes. There is a similar gap in the admittedly limited literature available on women in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony and this lacuna raises questions as to the extent of women's participation, if any, in the former British Colony, framing the basis of the current research.

---

[1] The Ellice Islands separated from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony in 1975 and became the independent nation of Tuvalu in 1978. The Gilbert, Phoenix, Line, and after much contentious debate, Ocean Island (now Banaba) became the Republic of Kiribati in 1979.

[2] While acknowledging the significant contribution of Ellice Island (Tuvaluan) women, the focus of this thesis is on the experiences of Gilbertese/I-Kiribati women of the predominantly sixteen islands and atolls of the Gilbert group of what now forms the Republic of Kiribati.

[3] Samantha Rose. (2005). *The role of literature in the decolonisation process in the South Pacific: case study of the short fiction of Kanak author Dewey Gorodey of New Caledonia* (Unpublished Honour's Thesis). Queensland University of Technology, Australia.

The aim of the present study is to create a history of decolonisation in the Gilbert Islands that is inclusive of women and to offer sustained consideration of the social, religious and political forces that prompted women's involvement in the development of the decolonising process and the shape given to the decolonisation process by women's involvement. The key objectives are to identify if women were included in the British Colonial administration's policy towards decolonisation and if so, in what capacity. This study positions the place of Gilbertese women within the wider regional context of decolonisation and how they were influenced by broader regional and international agendas for women's development. It aims to investigate how any such agendas were implemented and to assess their impacts.

Historical context for study

I argue that the women's interests program in Kiribati was intrinsically part of the British Colonial administration's steps towards preparing the Colony for independence. I make this point in light of the failure of histories of decolonisation of the GEIC to include or evaluate the significant contribution of this movement and the women involved. The women's interests program in the GEIC was strongly influenced by regional developments towards women's advancement, developments that were instigated by the South Pacific Commission (SPC). The British Colonial administration, especially under the Resident Commissioner V.J. Andersen, acknowledged that for the Colony to develop at a pace whereby it would

be ready for independence in the coming decade, a movement targeted at mobilising women, to act as change agents in the basic improvement of family and village life, was crucial.

The British Colonial administration worked in partnership with the SPC to fulfil this end. Regional trends towards women's advancement as well as steps towards decolonisation in the wider Pacific region also influenced the history of the women's interests movement. The indigenisation of Pacific Island Churches was a further influence. Through an historical analysis of the formalisation of the women's interests program, this thesis examines the phenomenon of women's clubs during the 1960s and 1970s and their socio-economic and political impact at village, island and national level, doing so within the broader framework of impending independence and the decolonisation process.

A major factor shaping the collaboration between the SPC and the British Colonial administration was the 1961 invitation by the SPC to all Pacific territories to send a female delegate to its first regional Pacific Women's Training Seminar in Apia, Samoa. The aim of the Seminar was to address the needs and issues facing women and their families in the Pacific as territories moved forward with plans for self-government. The GEIC sent a suitable Gilbertese delegate, Nei Katherine Tekanene. On her return, she worked closely with the Resident Commissioner and SPC Women's Interests Officer for the Pacific Region, Miss Marjorie Stewart, to initiate a Colony-wide women's interests program for the GEIC. In this thesis I present this process of implementing the women's interests program as a three staged

approach. Building on outcomes and information from the 1961 Seminar, regionally, the leadership of the Pacific Islands decided to establish the Community Education Training Centre (CETC) in Suva, Fiji. The CETC offered a ten month course in home economics and community education specifically targeted at addressing issues affecting the lives of women and their families. The course aimed to provide an opportunity for women of the Pacific to be trained as women's interests workers or community workers. Each CETC graduate was then expected to return to her home island and train others in what she had learnt. This training of women in home economics and community education was to be achieved through the establishment of women's clubs at village level. The GEIC administration and SPC agreed to fund two female delegates representing the major Churches of the Colony - the Catholic and Protestant – to attend the CETC.

To support the policy of a formalised women's interests program, authorities established the Women's Interests Office based at Bikenibeu village in South Tarawa. In 1965, authorities on GEIC appointed the British expatriate Mrs Roddy Cordon as the Women's Interests Officer for the Colony to provide further support to the program. The first stage of the plan was to establish village-based women's clubs. If possible, this was to be achieved by using existing, informal women's health committees or women's fellowships. GEIC authorities created a network of what came to be known as 'Homemakers' Clubs' across the Colony and coordinated by the Women's Interests Office headquarters (affectionately referred to by many locals as 'HQ'). Once a considerable number of clubs had been formed at village level, the second stage of the plan was for these to unite and form Island

Associations of Homemakers' Clubs. The Associations, which came to be known as *Irekenrao*, were to include representatives of each of the village Homemakers' Clubs. In essence, the *Irekenrao* mimicked the structure of Island Councils, or the male-dominated governing bodies of each island. The third stage was to create an overarching National Federation of Island Associations. This Federation was formalised in 1982 as *Aia Maea Ainen Kiribati* (AMAK) -'women's ring of friendship'. Taking into account the depleting phosphate reserves as the Colony's main revenue source by colonial-era extraction of these resources, the plan was for the National Federation to be self-financed through the payment of subscriptions and external funding assistance, where possible. Figure 1 presents a conceptual map of the key events of the women's interests movement within wider regional, Church and Colonial developments.

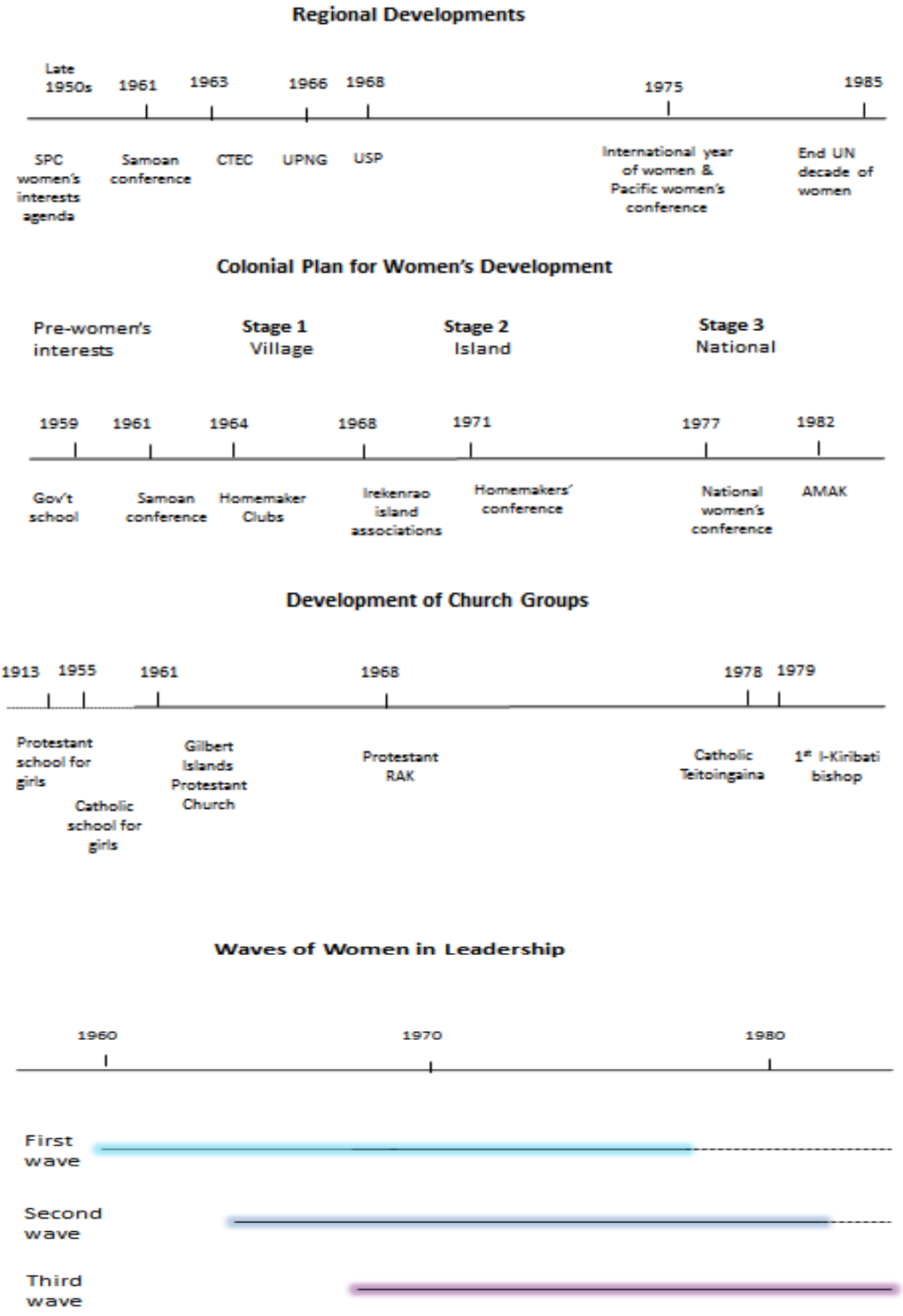
Statement of arguments

With this background in mind, this thesis traces how the Women's Interests Office, through what I will refer to as a "women's interests movement", attempted to implement these three stages. In doing so, I assert that it is possible to identity three key waves of female leadership within the women's interests movement. These waves overlap with and impact on each other. The first wave of female leadership can be identified as the 'border-dwellers' or 'educated elite'. This thesis argues that the position of these women on the 'fringe' of society and their ability to negotiate Gilbertese custom and Western concepts of development helped pave

the way for a greater acceptance of women in the public sphere. The Colonial administration intentionally identified and appropriated these women to implement the Colony's plans for women's development. In this context, I analyse two key events which provide insight into the role of border-dwellers in the women's interests movement – the attendance of Nei Katherine Tekanene at the 1961 Pacific Women's Training Seminar in Western Samoa and the election of Mrs Tekarei Russell to the GEIC Legislative Council in 1971.

The second wave of women comprised the graduates of the SPC- sponsored CETC who returned to the Colony as trained community workers. This thesis examines their role in facilitating community education opportunities and training to women within the network of Homemaker's Clubs living on remote and isolated Outer Islands. Furthermore, I present the argument that the affiliation and identities of community workers with their respective Church, Protestant or Catholic, led to the emergence of the third wave of female leadership and the rise of Church-based women's groups founded on existing women's fellowships. As the Colony underwent a process of decolonisation, in parallel, the Churches experienced a process of indigenisation. Women of the congregation, who had been exposed to concepts of representation and organisation through their membership of the Homemakers' Clubs, could now apply this knowledge to their own women's fellowship. In addition, after fulfilling their government service requirements many community workers (nuns in particular in the Catholic tradition) could choose to work for their Church in the areas of women's interests.

Figure 1: Timelines for Regional Women's Development, Colonial Plan for Women's Development, Development of Church Groups and Waves of Women in Leadership



By independence in 1979, both the Protestant and Catholic Churches had formalised structures of their women's fellowships and had established separate women's interests programs independent of and in competition with the government-led Homemakers' Clubs. The first and second stages of implementing the Colony's women's interests plan had been successful. However, the third stage proved problematic.

The time pressure of belonging to two clubs (the Homemakers' as well as their Church-based club), along with the financial burden of paying two sets of subscriptions, meant that many women opted to commit only to their Church-based club. For many islanders, villages were not a cohesive social unit, whereas belonging to a Church formed part of one's identity. Furthermore, there was greater legitimacy for women to belong to their Church-based club, rather than being seen as doing 'women's work' through the government imposed Homemaker's Clubs. The male leaders of a strongly patriarchal society believed that belonging to a Church-based club and doing Church work as well as women's work, was of more value. As a result, while the Colonial administration had made plans to create a national framework for women's interests through a network of village-based women's clubs, by the late 1970s, Church-based clubs had risen to prominence in its place and had formulated independent and separate programs. The functions and outcomes of the Church-based women's interests programs were similar to the government groups. Program leaders continued to view women's roles as being good mothers and wives and focused on a welfare approach to improving home, family and village life. The contribution of women in preparing

the Colony for independence had been, in a sense, superseded by a growing recognition of the significant role of women in supporting the politicising and entrenching of the Churches, which in turn led to the indigenisation of women's clubs, a major point that this thesis explores.

In the context of the 1960s and 1970s, it is argued that women, through their involvement and participation in women's clubs, contributed to the decolonisation process. This thesis positions women within the histories of decolonisation and asserts that so far the historiography has neglected to appropriately acknowledge their contribution. Calls for responsible government in the GEIC were initiated in the 1960s. A decade later, preparation for constitutional changes towards independence began with initiatives towards internal self-government. Ethnic and linguistic differences between Ellice Islanders and the Gilbertese became evident during the 1970s and culminated in a referendum in 1974 when the Ellice Island group voted for separation. Banabans by this time had been resettled in Rabi Island, Fiji for 30 years, but were still a vocal force in independence discussions. Separation from the Ellice Islands was formalised in 1975, and in 1978, the Ellice Islands regained independence and were renamed Tuvalu. Kiribati adopted internal self-government and a Ministerial system in 1977 and on the 12 July, 1979, with a population of less than sixty thousand, Kiribati regained independence (see Figure 2 for a list of key dates).

Figure 2: Key Dates of the Women's Interests Movement

Key Dates

1913	Rongonrongo, Beru Protestant School for Girls opened
1950s	South Pacific Commission established women's interests on regional agenda
1955	Catholic school for girls opens at Taborio, North Tarawa
1959	EBS government school for girls
1961	Pacific Women's Training Seminar in Western Samoa
	Appointment of Miss Stewart of SPC Women's Interests Officer
1962	Visit by Miss Stewart, on invitation by Resident Commissioner VJ Andersen, to GEIC
1963	Community Education Training Centre (CETC)established by SPC
1964	First CETC graduates
	Establishment of government-sponsored women's clubs network
1964 - 1967	Katherine Tekanene appointed to Advisory Council
1965	Arrival of Mrs Cordon as Women's Interests Officer (WIO) for the Colony
1968	Protestant women's fellowship formalised
	Establishment of Gilbert Islands Protestant Church
	Establishment of government-sponsored Island Associations
1971	First Conference for Colony Women
1971	Election of Mrs Russell (served two terms, second as Minister of Health and Welfare)
1972	Departure of Mrs Cordon, Katherine Tekanene as WIO (localised position)
1975	UN International Year of Women, Pacific Women's Conference
	Separation of Ellice Islands
1977	National Women's Conference
1978	Catholic women's fellowship formalised
	Republic of Kiribati declared
1982	AMAK (National Federation of Women) established
1989	End of UN Decade of Women

Thesis structure and chapter outline

After this introductory Chapter, Chapter Two provides a discussion of the three main bodies of literature relevant to my argument – decolonisation, history and gender. Literature on the indigenisation of Island Churches is also pivotal to this analysis. Chapter Three outlines the methodological approaches adopted in this research project and provides a critical reflection on my experiences conducting fieldwork in Kiribati.

Chapter Four assesses the role of border-dwellers in the establishment of a formalised women's interests network. In doing so, I identify 'border-dwellers' as a minority group of educated Gilbertese women and I evaluate the significance of the relationships of these women with expatriates. The Chapter highlights the ability of these women to amalgamate Gilbertese custom with Western concepts of development. Furthermore, I identify the influence of border-dweller women in this period as constituting the first wave of the women's interests movement. The period of the first wave is considered to be from 1961 onwards, marking the attendance of Nei Katherine Tekanene at Women's Interests Training Seminar in Apia, Samoa, to the election of Mrs Tekarei Russell to the Legislative Council in 1971. The Chapter provides a narrative on early developments of the women's interests movement and positions the role of the border-dweller in wider regional trends relating to developments towards women's advancement. The collaboration of the SPC and British Colonial administration in these early developments is also discussed.

Chapter Five examines the period from 1963, marking the first women of the Colony to attend the regional Community Education Training Centre (CETC) to be trained as community workers, through to the first Colony-wide Conference of Homemakers' Clubs in 1971. The Chapter analyses the appointment of British expatriate, Mrs Roddy Cordon as the Women's Interests Officer for the Colony, and her role in facilitating the development of the network of Homemakers' Clubs and promoting the informal education of adult women. A critique of newsletters published by the Women's Interests Office as well as island reports from community workers from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s provides insight into the goals and impact of the overall women's interests movement. I examine the impact of the informal education of village women in regard to exposing them to developments within the region as well as the wider world. A welfare approach defined women's development during this period. Embedded as it was in Christian philosophy, the welfare approach focused on advancements for women through their roles as mothers and wives. The impact of this approach is assessed and its outcomes explored.

Also in this Chapter, I assert the significance of the activities of community workers and outline their role in implementing the first two stages of the Colony's women's interests program. The first stage sees the establishment of village-based, non-denominational women's clubs (through the Homemakers' network) while the second stage sees the formation of island-level Associations of village clubs. As indicators of the outcomes achieved in these stages, the successful mobilisation of

the network of Homemakers' Club members in the election of border-dweller Mrs Tekarei Russell and the crucial role women played in community development initiatives are examined. The fundraising activities of women's clubs during this period highlight these achievements. Lastly, the Chapter concludes with an assessment of the 1971 Colony-wide Conference of Homemakers' Clubs and a summary of these social and political developments.

Chapter Six contextualises these events within a broader chronological pattern. Firstly, the Chapter traces the political career of border-dweller, Mrs Tekarei Russell, as the first Lady Minister to be elected to the Legislative Council. I draw on newspaper articles and Ministerial correspondence and archives, as well as interviews in order to evaluate Mrs Russell's attempt to be a representative of the needs of the women of the Colony. In this evaluation, examples whereby old and new customs were negotiated, challenged and interwoven are emphasised. Secondly, it evaluates the influence of the regional women's movement as it gained momentum in 1975 with the United Nations International Year of Women and discusses the engagement of Gilbertese women in this movement. This analysis is followed by an assessment of the 1977 National Women's Conference which marked the beginning of the Colony's third stage of the women's interests movement towards a national federation of women. Overall, this Chapter positions the role of women within the context of regional and Colonial developments of the 1970s.

Chapter Seven traces the contribution of women within the histories of the missions and assesses the impact of the indigenisation of Island Churches in the late 1970s. This period saw the rise of Church-based women's clubs. A narrative is presented on the histories of the two Church-based groups – the Catholic *Teitoingaina* and Protestant, *Reitan Aine Kamatu* (RAK). I consider the rivalries between the two prominent Church-based clubs – the Catholic and the Protestant – and provide an historical analysis to explain the reasons for this ongoing tension. The impact of the rise of the Church-based clubs on the Homemakers' network is assessed following which it is argued that the second wave of women's leadership, through the CETC-trained community workers, provided a platform from which the Church-based clubs were able to rise to prominence. This in turn fractured the Homemakers' network. The third stage for the British Colonial administration's plan was not fully achieved and the intention to formalise the women's interests plan was subverted by the agendas and strength of the Church-based structures.

Chapter Eight traces the formation of the National Federation of Women - *Aia Maea Ainen Kiribati* (AMAK) and draws comparisons between colonial and post-independence relationships. It is argued that rivalry between the Church groups was a pivotal factor leading to AMAK's collapse exacerbating deficiencies in resourcing that jeopardised its independence from government and regional development agendas. The failings of the welfare approach to development that were entrenched within Kiribati development programs of the 1960s to 1980s, are identified.

In my concluding Chapter Nine, I provide an overview of the history of women's clubs from their inception in 1961 to the regaining of independence of the former Gilbert Islands in the forming of the Republic of Kiribati in 1979 (see Figure 2) and discuss the legacy of the movement through a reflection on contemporary issues. This dissertation is intended to open out for analysis the hitherto neglected aspects of the decolonisation process in the GEIC that have involved women. As it further suggests, the beginnings of an historical and conceptual framework for understanding the process of decolonisation as including the active agency of women, the concluding Chapter will suggest further avenues for research that emerge from both my archival discoveries and the overall framework I have constructed.

Image 2: Aerial photograph of Abaiang atoll

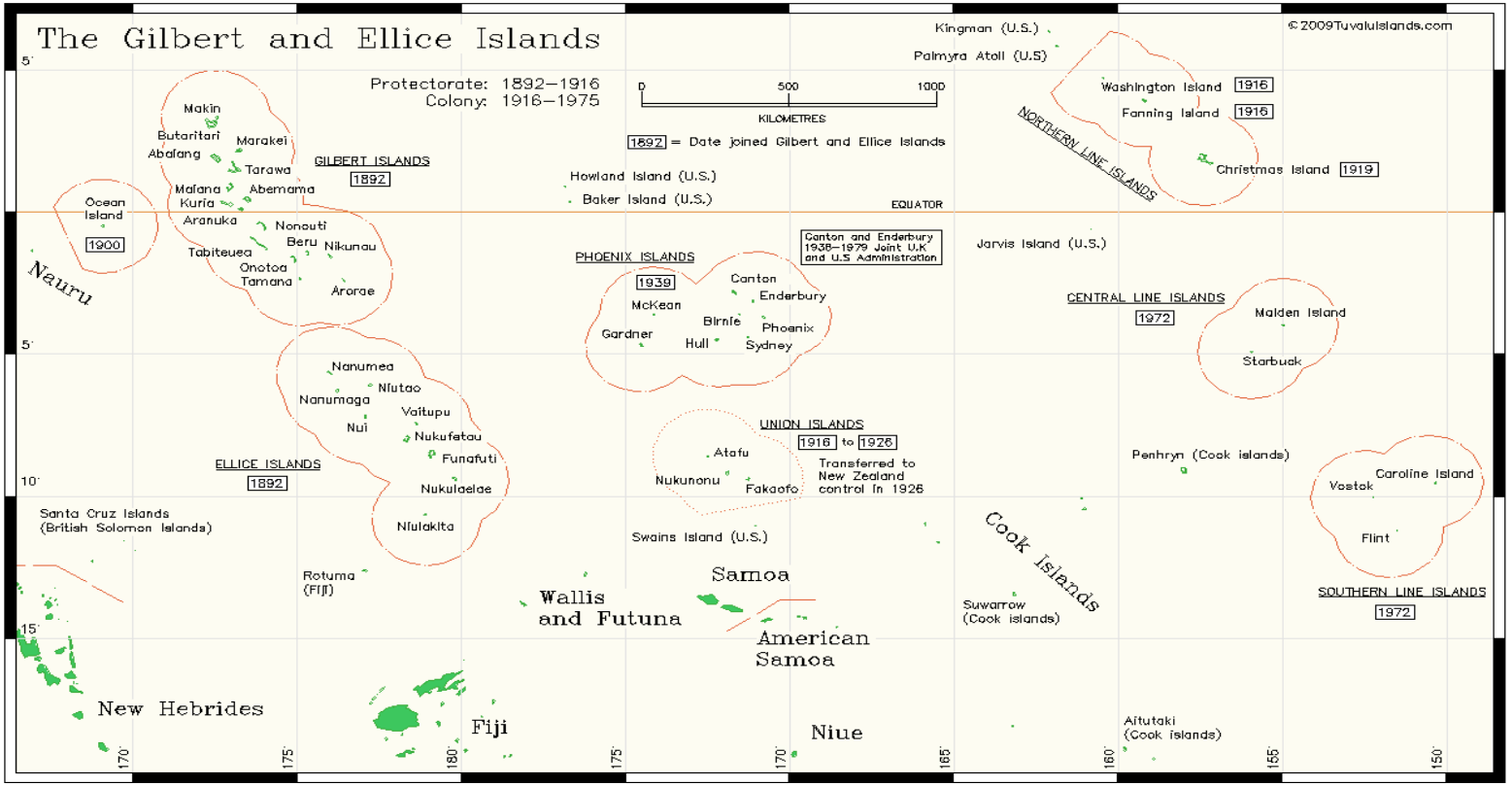


Image 3: Map of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands[4]

[4] 'Map of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands' (n.d.) Retrieved March 14, 2013 from http://brcstamps.com/catalog/countries/Gilbert_and_Ellice_Islands/GEIC_Map_1.html

Geographic Context

In reading this thesis, the following clarifications and definitions should be taken into consideration. The Republic of Kiribati includes the 32 low lying atolls and one raised coral island of the Gilbert Islands group[5], Phoenix[6] and Line Islands[7] as well as Banaba[8] (formerly Ocean Island) (see Image 3: Map of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony). Separating from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony in 1975, are the nine islands[9] of the former Ellice Islands which now form the nation of Tuvalu (which regained independence in 1978). As a result of the low lying atoll environment, natural resources are limited. The remoteness and isolation of the group means that travel between atolls is difficult. This has resulted in unequal development with urbanisation of South Tarawa and limited infrastructure in the Outer Islands (see Image 2: Aerial photograph of Abaiang atoll).

---

[5] The sixteen islands and atolls of the Gilbert group are Abaiang, Abemama, Aranuka, Arorae, Beru, Butaritari, Kuria, Maiana, Marakei, Makin, Nikunau, Nonouti, Onotoa, Tabiteuea, Tamana and Tarawa. The focus of this thesis is on the experience of women within the Gilbert Islands group. To distinguish the uneven development of Tarawa, the atoll is referred to as North (less developed) and South (the headquarters for the British administration after the Second World War). South Tarawa is also referred to as 'urban South Tarawa'. For the purposes of coordination by the Women's Interests Office (based in urban South Tarawa) of island tours of community workers, all islands outside Tarawa are referred to as 'Outer Islands'. Given the lack of infrastructure and development in North Tarawa, in terms of the experiences of women, North Tarawa can be considered an 'Outer Island'.

[6] The Phoenix Islands, largely uninhabited, include Kanton Island (the only island to be inhabited by a small number of families), Enderbury, Birnie, McKean, Rawaki, Manra, Orona and Nikumaroro.

[7] The Line Islands include Caroline Island, Flint Island, Kiritimati, Malden Island, Starbuck Island, Tabuaeran (Fanning Island), Teraina (Washington) and Vostok Island.

[8] As the British administration had relocated the majority of Banabans (Ocean Island) to Rabi Island, Fiji in successive migrations from 1945 onwards, (as a result of the degradation of their home island from extensive phosphate mining), the experience of Banaban women in the decolonisation process, while significant, is outside the scope of this thesis. For further reading on the history of Banaba see Raobeia Ken Sigrah & Stacey M. King, 2001, *Te rii ni Banaba*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji

[9] The nine islands of Tuvalu are Funafuti, Nanumea, Nui, Nukufetau, Nukulaelae, Vatupu, Nanumanga, Niulakita and Niutao.

Linguistic context

'Kiribati' is the local spelling of 'Gilberts'. The word 'Kiribati' refers to both the nation, as in the Republic of Kiribati, as well as the language of Kiribati.[10] The people of Kiribati are referred to as 'I-Kiribati'.[11] In this thesis, the term 'Gilbertese' has the same meaning and is interchangeable with 'I-Kiribati'. Gilbertese/I-Kiribati is the term given to the first people who inhabited the atolls and islands which now form the Republic of Kiribati, with the exception of Banaba.[12] Despite the absence of any form of unifying governing body pre-contact, such as prevailed in the Kingdom of Tonga, the I-Kiribati people shared strong linguistic similarities prior to European contact. The exception of Banaba, which for historical differences did not share similar experiences of the decolonisation process nor of the women's interests movement as/with Gilbertese women, means that Banabans are separately identified in this thesis.[13]

---

[10] 'Kiribati' is pronounced 'Kirr-i-bas', with the 'ti' the equivalent sound of an English 's'.
[11] Pronounced 'ee-Kirr-i-bas'.
[12] See footnote 8
[13] Prior to the Second World War, the Colonial administrative headquarters was based in Ocean Island/Banaba. After the Second World War, headquarters moved to South Tarawa where the central government remains today. During the 1960s and 1970s many Gilbertese/I-Kiribati women lived in Ocean Island as they followed their husbands who worked for the British Phosphate Company. These women formed women's clubs as a part of the wider women's interests program. These experiences are included within the scope of this thesis.

Nomenclature of women's groups

It is also necessary to clarify the terminology relating to the theoretical and epistemic foundations of this thesis and its analysis of welfare and women's interest groups. The term 'women's interests refers to Western introduced concepts of development aimed to advance the situation of women in the territories of the Pacific. The South Pacific Commission (SPC) agenda and the British Colonial administration, established a Women's Interests Office in South Tarawa in 1965 to coordinate and be responsible for the informal education of adult women. In the context of the GEIC in the 1960s and 1970s, women's interests activities and initiatives were conducted through, what Caroline Moser has coined, a welfare approach to women's development.[14] The welfare approach focused on women's reproductive roles, and viewed women as integrated into the mainstream of development through their maternal functions.[15] As such, women's interests formed the basis for women's development during this period.

While Western notions of feminism, significantly second wave feminism, influenced regional developments for Pacific women particularly in the 1970s, I-Kiribati women (and men) had (and continue to have) strong objections to any labels of, or reference to, 'women's liberation' and 'feminism' in terms of describing the work of women in this period. From a Western perspective, while many of the activities undertaken by women in this period could be argued as feminist in nature, out of

[14] Moser, C. (1993). *Gender planning and development: Theory, practice and training.* London: Routledge. p 56
[15] ibid.

respect for the women involved who would strongly disagree and baulk (and did when interviewed) at the notion,[16] the terms 'women's interests and 'women's work' have been adopted instead as providing a meaningful frame of reference for these activities and one that emerges more organically from the social structures under review rather than using terminology more suited to western experiences.

Women's clubs refers to the government–led network of Homemakers' Clubs. Women's clubs came into existence at village level and were intended to be non-denominational and inclusive of all women within the village. Church-based women's groups refer to groups that were formed within women's fellowships. Women's committees commonly refer to the work of Women's Health Committees. The function of these committees, prevalent in the 1940s and 1950s, was to routinely inspect the cleanliness of the village and people's houses. In the beginning, there was tension between the women's committees and women's clubs (Homemakers' Clubs) (as experienced by Nei Tekanene) as the old women who enjoyed a modest level of power within these structures, did not wish to relinquish to newer social forces. However gradually, as the benefits of belonging to a government-based organisation with access to resources and funding were realised, the Homemakers' network absorbed these committees (and later, the Church-based groups). Reference to women's associations is the collective term of women's clubs who are represented at island level. For example, the *Irekenrao* of Beru refers to an Association of all of the Homemaker's Clubs from that island.

[16] Discussed in Chapter 6

'Agents of change', for the purposes of this thesis, follows the meaning inferred in the 1968 Report to the Resident Commissioner, whereby the authors consider agents of change to be people or groups who inadvertently or otherwise, create social change in addition to their own objectives.[17] The report acknowledged that change agents can be conscious or unconscious, appropriated or self-driven. This thesis asserts that women's participation through women's clubs can be considered an act of agency in the context of decolonisation processes. Community education refers to the informal education of adult women through structured curricula and hands on practice sessions. Community education was an introduced concept and was part of wider regional development strategies.

With these thoughts in mind, it is now possible to give more detailed analysis of the available literature on the history of Kiribati. Doing so brings into perspective the extent to which women's activities and interests have largely been neglected by modern scholars in this field. This analysis also clarifies the outlets for women's agency in the religious and government sponsored homemaking groups.

[17] McCreary J. R., & Boardman D.W. (1968). *Some impressions of social change in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands: A report to the Resident Commissioner*. Department of Social Science, Victoria University of Wellington, p 31

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The major bodies of literature relevant to the development, implementation and impact of the women's interests program and women's groups of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony during the 1960s and 1970s are decolonisation, gender, development, adult education of women and history. Histories of the former Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony and modern Kiribati, texts on the patterns of British Colonialism and decolonisation as well as literature on the discourse of gender - particularly the works of Pacific Islanders and women - are fundamental stepping stones toward an analysis of I-Kiribati women's groups. Histories of Christianity in Oceania and the emergence of indigenised Island Churches are also relevant in this study.

General histories of Oceania

During the 1990s and 2000s, an influx of general histories and patterns of colonialism in Oceania were produced. Examples within this body of literature include Francis Hezel's 1992 paper 'Recolonising Islands and Decolonising History' published in *Pacific History: papers from the eighth Pacific History Association*

Conference edited by Donald Rubinstein.[18] In 1994, Howe, Kiste and Lal edited *Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century*[19] which encompassed a range of chapters describing and analysing patterns of colonial rule in the Pacific. The following year, Brij Lal and Hank Nelson, edited *Lines across the sea; colonial inheritance in the postcolonial Pacific*[20] and in 1997 Denoon edited *Emerging from empire? Decolonisation in the Pacific*[21], both pivotal works in regard to a history of self-determination and decolonisation in Oceania. In 2000 Stewart Firth's chapter 'Decolonisation'[22] was published in *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History* edited by Robert Borofsky,[23] adding another significant contribution to the body of literature on decolonisation in the Pacific, and more recently Nicholas Thomas (2010) *Islanders: The Pacific in the Age of Empire.*[24] In terms of general histories, of importance are Matt Masuda (2012) [1] P*acific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples, and Cultures*,[25] Steven Roger Fischer (2002) *A History of the Pacific Islands*[26], Ian Campbell (1992) *A History of the Pacific Islands*[27] and

---

[18] Hezel, F. (1992). Recolonising islands and decolonising history. In D. H. Rubinstein (Ed.), *Pacific History: Papers from the 8th Pacific History Association Conference.* Guam: University of Guam Press and Micronesian Area Research Centre.

[19] Howe, K., Kiste, R., & Lal, B. V. (Eds.), (1994) *Tides of history: The Pacific Islands in the twentieth century*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press

[20] Lal, B. V., & Nelson, H. (Eds.), (1995). *Lines across the sea: colonial inheritance in the post-colonial Pacific*. Pacific History Association.

[21] Denoon, D. (Ed.), (1997). *Emerging from Empire? Decolonisation in the Pacific.* Proceedings of a workshop at the Australian National University, December 1996, Canberra: Division of Pacific and Asian History, Australian National University.

[22] Firth, S. (2000). Decolonization. In R. Borofsky (Ed.), *Remembrance of Pacific pasts: An invitation to remake history* (pp.314 – 332). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

[23] Borofsky, R. (Ed). (2000). *Remembrance of Pacific pasts: An invitation to remake history.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

[24] Thomas, N. (2010). *Islanders: The Pacific in the age of empire*. Yale: Yale University Press.

[25] Matsuda, M. (2012). Pacific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples, and Cultures. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[26] Fischer, S. R. (2002). *A history of the Pacific Islands*. Palgrave.

[27] Campbell, I. C. (1990). *A history of the Pacific islands*. California: University of California Press.

Evelyn Colbert (1997) *The Pacific Islands: paths to the present*.[28] The collected essays of Donald Denoon (et al) *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders* in 1997 is also of note.[29]

Overall, these texts discuss the political histories of a select range of Pacific Island states. Perhaps due to the size of Kiribati (both demographically and physically) and the general ease with which British political devolution occurred, the experience of decolonisation in Kiribati is barely mentioned; let alone the experience of I-Kiribati women. Women's participation within the political domain is generally ignored or downplayed. The significant work on decolonisation and the experience of Kiribati was 'Kiribati: Nation of Water' by I-Kiribati author Roniti Teiwaki[30] in *Politics in Micronesia* edited by Ron Crocombe and Ahmed Ali, published in 1983.[31] Teiwaki outlines chronologically the political development of Kiribati towards independence. There is no mention of women in the context of facilitating or initiating change. Uentabo Neemia has also written about decolonisation in Kiribati (but not exclusively about the experience of Kiribati) in his chapter 'Decolonisation and Democracy in the South Pacific'[32] in C*ulture and*

[28] Colbert, E. S. (1997). *The Pacific Islands: Paths to the present*. Westview Press
[29] Denoon, D., & Meleisea, M. (2004). *The Cambridge history of the Pacific Islanders*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[30] Teiwaki, R. (1982). Kiribati: Nation of water. In R. Crocombe and A. Ali (Eds.), *Politics in Micronesia* (pp. 2-37). Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific.
[31] Crocombe, R. & Ali, A. (Ed) (1983). *Politics in Micronesia.* Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.
[32] Neemia, U. (1992). 'Decolonization and Democracy in the South Pacific' In Ron Crocombe (Ed) *Culture and Democracy in the South Pacific,* Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, pp 1-8

Democracy in the South Pacific edited by Ron Crocombe in 1992.[33] His main concern is that of the continual influence of foreign powers in the South Pacific, particularly in regards to economics and in particular argues that the decolonisation process is far from being complete and describes it as a 'continual process'.[34] While Neemia does not engage in a discussion on women, Ron Crocombe in the following chapter 'The Future of Democracy in the Pacific Islands'[35] dedicates just over two pages to the 'Democratic participation of Women'.[36] While Kiribati is not explicitly mentioned, his reference to women as political agents reflects a changing awareness among historians and political scientists. Barrie Macdonald's chapter 'Britain'[37] discusses the overarching British administration's policies towards decolonisation and positions Kiribati within this broader examination.

Positioning women in early histories of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony

In the first half of the twentieth century, resident Europeans on the Gilbert Islands documented their experiences and provided early anthropological writings on the customs and traditions of the Gilbertese people. The writings of Sir Arthur Grimble, and Reverend Father Ernest Sabatier are of particular interest to this thesis. These early works reveal two key points. Firstly, the writings provide glimpses of the

---

[33] Crocombe, R. (Ed.), (1992) *Culture and democracy in the South Pacific* (pp.9-27). Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific

[34] Neemia, op.cit., p 8

[35] Crocombe, R. (1992). The future of democracy in the Pacific Islands. In R. Crocombe (Ed.), *Culture and democracy in the South Pacific* (pp.9-27). Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

[36] Crocombe, op. cit., pp 17 - 19

[37] Macdonald, B. (1994) Britain In Howe, K., Kiste, R., & Lal, B. V. (Eds.), *Tides of history: The Pacific Islands in the twentieth century*. (pp 170-194) Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press

status of women prior to the beginning of the decolonisation process. Secondly, the works reveal the attitudes of two key Europeans, Grimble and Sabatier, (representing the Colony and Mission respectively) towards women.

Grimble's *Pattern of Islands*[38] is a memoir based on his experiences as a British cadet and then District Officer in the Gilbert and Ellice Island Colony. Based largely in Tarawa and for a period in Abemama, Grimble's narrative captures events and personalities he and his wife Olivia encountered while living in the atolls. Through his story-telling, Grimble presents women in terms of their reproductive role. For example, Grimble states that the 'main job of a Gilbertese woman is to cook for her man'.[39] In describing child birth, Grimble observes,

> No Gilbertese woman of those days would dream of calling medical help in normal circumstances. Childbearing as a function had no terror and little discomfort for those lissom-bodied mothers'.[40]

In retelling the story of the 'Happy Old Lady and Sad Old Man', Grimble reflects on life in the villages prior to the claiming of the atolls as a British Protectorate in 1892 when 'a state of faction warfare was the normal condition of Gilbertese life of old'.[41] The central focus of this story is an elderly woman from Tarawa who had lost her husband in a battle. Grimble writes that, as a result of internal warfare, 'She herself, up to the coming of the flag – when she must have been seventy – had

[38] Grimble, A. (1952). *A pattern of islands*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.
[39] ibid., p 111
[40] ibid., p 238
[41] ibid., p 178

never known what it was, maid or wife, to stray outside the village settlement of her men-folk'.[42] Quoting from the old lady, Grimble recalls,

> "In those days" she continued, "death was on the right hand and on the left. If we wandered north, we were killed or raped. If we wandered south, we were killed or raped. If we returned alive from walking abroad, our husbands themselves killed us, for they said we had gone forth seeking to be raped. That was indeed just, for a woman who disobeys her husband is a woman of no account, and it matters not how she dies".

This story reveals the hardships faced on women as a result of warfare and the restricted movement of women as they were confined to the village of their 'men-folk'. It also reveals attitudes of Gilbertese men towards rape and onus of women to preserve their own virtue by staying within the village. Grimble notes that the *Pax Britannica* helped to bring peace to the atolls, again quoting the old lady, 'Yet how beautiful is life in our villages, now that there is no killing and war no more'.[43]

Grimble also writes of the work of his wife Olivia in setting up an informal women's health clinic as early as 1917 when his family were located on Abemama where Grimble worked as District Officer. Describing the work of his wife, Olivia, Grimble states that in the absence of a doctor and only having a Dresser on the island of Abemama,

> She began, irreproachably enough, by combing the villages for sick children and establishing a kind of nursing-home-cum-mothers'-education-centre in one of the houses of the servants' quarters…Most of her cases called only for sensible hygiene or care about diet, but there were emergencies which demanded a certain inventiveness.[44]

---

[42] ibid.
[43] ibid.
[44] ibid., p 230

Grimble asserts, that the 'end result was the dissemination of a very reasonable knowledge of pre-natal hygiene and infant welfare among the women of Abemama'.[45] This highlights an early example of the role of European women in advocating community education for Gilbertese women (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4).

Writing in the same period, Reverend Father Ernest Sabatier, a French Priest of the Sacred Heart mission, was posted to Abemama in 1912. As District Officer stationed in Abemama in 1917, Grimble become close to Sabatier and 'acquired a respect and admiration for the scholar-priest'.[46]

Sabatier's *Astride the Equator: An account of the Gilbert Islands* provides observations on Gilbertese women's role in the family as well as their work, dress and dance. In describing a typical Gilbertese family, Sabatier states, the 'original cell of society, the family, was already firmly established long before the arrival of Christianity, as far as one can judge from old stories and traditions.[47] Positioning women within the family unit, Sabatier claims,

> The woman was already the man's companion rather than his slave. Not expected to do hard manual labour, she had only to attend to household tasks and those jobs she could do without over-exhausting herself – such as going with her husband to help with certain types of fishing, helping him to build the house or prepare the babai pits. Far from being bought from her

[45] ibid., p 235
[46] Maude, H (1977)'Foreward' In Ernest Sabatier *Astride the equator: An account of the Gilbert Islands.* Trans Ursula Nixon, Oxford: Oxford University Press. P vi
[47] Sabatier, E (1977) *Astride the equator: An account of the Gilbert Islands.* Trans Ursula Nixon, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 80

> parents she came to her husband with her inheritances, less it must be admitted than her brothers' share.[48]

Furthermore, Sabatier asserts the particular instances where some women enjoyed raised prestige within the village. For example,

> An only daughter was powerful and much sought after. She not only inherited her father's land but also his knowledge and skill and sometimes his office as well. The canoe fleet would be organized and led by the navigator's daughter and it was the soothsayer's daughter who was consulted before undertaking any important enterprise.[49]

Sabatier describes the life of a Gilbertese girl from childhood, puberty, marriage, motherhood and also reflects on a woman's life as a grandmother. Acknowledging the importance of marriage on a woman's status, he notes that 'women without husbands were beneath consideration. They were referred to as the waste of their generation'.[50] Significantly, Sabatier recognises the role of the extended family unit in ensuring a woman was well-treated by her husband, stating that the 'husband who behaved brutally knew just whom he would have to face'.[51]

In an early passage, he provides a narrative of a typical day for a Gilbertese woman. In this he highlights the role of a woman in support of her husband, from collecting water in the morning, gathering shell-fish, hunting octopus, preparing pandanus and weaving mats, tending to the *babai* pits, making string, cooking and looking after the children.

---

[48] ibid.
[49] ibid.
[50] ibid.
[51] ibid.

Despite his observations on women's work, Sabatier, it seems, is quite scathing of the perceived idleness of Gilbertese women.

> The Gilbertese woman is hardly encouraged to work. Her best produce: mats, baskets, fans and fine hats, don't have any sale. Once she has attended to her children she has plenty of spare time and dancing and card-playing doesn't fill it up. She has virtually unlimited time for dreaming.[52]

He also attempts to offer a comparison of women's lives pre-missionary contact,

> How can we describe the young girls of bygone days? They were small and insignificant, passive and rather savage-looking with big frightened eyes and sleek much-oiled hair flowing loose. Now the same sort of girl is in evidence but she is gentler and less wild. She clothes her body, shining like new bronze, in *lava lava* or short dress which doesn't hinder her movements. These young girls work hard at school, are devoted church members and in the hands of the Sisters and missionaries they are malleable.[53]

The early works of Grimble and Sabatier provide a useful comparison of women's roles pre and post the decolonisation process.

Positioning women in modern histories of Kiribati

Cinderellas of the Empire: towards a history of Kiribati and Tuvalu (1982) by Barrie Macdonald[54] is the major historical account on Kiribati, dedicating the final chapters on the decolonisation process. However, no entry on 'women' can be found in the index.[55] While Macdonald does refer to women throughout the text (without being mentioned in the index), he does so in an anthropological sense and regards

---

[52] ibid., p 108
[53] ibid., pp 101-102
[54] Macdonald, B. (1982). *Cinderellas of the Empire: Towards a history of Kiribati and Tuvalu.* Canberra: Australian National University Press.
[55] Tekarei Russell is mentioned in *Cinderellas of the Empire* as 'The first woman to be successful in a Colony election' (Macdonald, op. cit., p 239) however this is found under the entry 'Tekarei Russell' rather than 'women'.

women in the context of the domestic, family unit and women's functions within this unit, for example marriage and child-rearing and the associated roles of both. The ground-breaking *Kiribati: aspects of history* (1984) edited by Alaima Talu (et al)[56] emerged from the workshop for I-Kiribati authors that produced the first Indigenous, multi-authored text. Other key pioneering works include *Kiribati; a changing atoll culture* (1985) edited by Alaima Talu (et al)[57] and *Atoll Politics: the Republic of Kiribati* (1993) edited by Howard van Trease.[58] These edited works include a range of articles which address historical, political and social aspects of Kiribati. These are inclusive of women's perspectives. However, the chapters on women largely focus on domestic issues, such as the family, women's health and parenting. For example, in *Kiribati: a changing atoll culture,* Chapter Two is entitled 'Mothers and Infants'[59]. The author of the chapter, Rite Teatao Tira outlines issues concerning I-Kiribati women during the mid-1980s under the sub-headings of; 'family living', 'medical facilities', 'caring for infants', 'health for infants' and 'women's role in family and community'. [60] Rite Teatao Tira describes the roles of Kiribati's national women's federations, the *Aia Maea Ainen Kiribati* (AMAK) as being predominantly concerned with promoting the status of women and

---

[56] Talu, Sister A et. al. (1979). *Kiribati: Aspects of history*. Tarawa: Ministry of Education, Training and Culture

[57] Talu, Sister A. (et al.). (1985) *Kiribati: A changing Atoll culture* Tarawa: Ministry of Education.

[58] van Trease, H. (Ed.), (1993). *Atoll politics: The Republic of Kiribati.* Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury.

[59] Tira, R. T. (1985) Mothers and Infants. In Sister A. Talu. (et al.). *Kiribati: A changing Atoll culture* (pp. 17-26). Tarawa: Ministry of Education.

[60] ibid., pp 24-5

preserving Kiribati culture within the domestic, family unit[61]. In her last paragraph, Rite Teatao Tira explains women's role within the *maneaba* as follows:

> However, in the Kiribati custom, a woman still today had no right to speak in the *maneaba*. It is my personal view that I wish this will not change, as the *maneaba* system is the main key to our culture that still exists from the past'.[62]

While Rite Tira is well known for her involvement in the women's groups and is a strong advocate for women's rights this quote reflects general sentiments amongst many I-Kiribati women of the importance of maintaining and preserving Kiribati culture.[63] In his article 'Creating the past: Custom and Identity in the Contemporary Pacific', Keesing notes that the 'reification of the customs of ancestors into a symbol to which a political stance is taken – whether rejection or idealization – is not new in the Pacific'.[64]

In the chapter written by Taboneao Ngaebi, Tekarei Russell and Fenua Tamuera, 'The status of women' in 1993 in Howard van Trease (Ed) *Atoll Politics: the Republic of Kiribati,*[65] the authors describe the traditional role of women, attitudes, issues and women's associations. The authors describe, similar to Rite Teatao Tira, the traditional role of I-Kiribati women as fulfilling the functions of daughter, wife and

---

[61] ibid.
[62] ibid., p 25
[63] In subsequent interviews with Rita Tira regarding this quote, she explained that while she is a strong advocate for women's advancement in Kiribati she believes it is important to maintain cultural institutions such as the *maneaba* system. As a Christian, she believes in the sanctity of marriage and argues that by having a good Christian marriage issues are discussed within the household prior to attending the *maneaba* and as a result her husband acts on her behalf and voices her opinions within the *maneaba*. See interview with Nei Rita Tira, 16 March, 2009.
[64] Keesing, R. (1989) Creating the Past: Custom and identity in the Contemporary Pacific, *The Contemporary Pacific,* 1 (1), p 32
[65] Ngaebi, T et. al. (1993). The status of women. In H. van Trease (Ed.), *Atoll politics: The Republic of Kiribati* (pp. 266-269). Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury.

mother. In the context of traditional decision-making processes, Ngaebi, Russell and Tamuera discuss the *maneaba* system and the silence of women within this system. The authors explain that politics has traditionally been seen as 'men's business' and that while women are present in the *maneaba* they are traditionally prohibited from speaking publicly, rather women 'sat behind the men and whispered what they thought'.[66]

In contrast to Rite Teatao Tira, eight years later these authors writing in the early 1990s argue against customary barriers to women's development. Ngaebi, Russell and Tamuera asserts 'the degree to which a woman is able to participate more actively outside the family in community affairs depends a great deal on how understanding the husband is'[67] and that despite an increase in the education of women 'there are still many aspects of traditional society which work against the progress of women'.[68] The authors claim it is the attitude of men which determines whether a woman can or cannot progress and argue that despite women being organised and educated, no change in attitude will come until men are educated to work in partnership with women.[69] Ngaebi, Russell and Tamuera critique contemporary forms of discrimination faced by I-Kiribati women, particularly citizenship rights, rights to land, working women and domestic violence. In accordance with Rite Teatoa Tira's chapter, Ngaebi, Russell and Tamuera assert the significance of women's associations and clubs in improving women's rights and

[66] ibid., p 266
[67] ibid.
[68] ibid.
[69] ibid.

development, particularly in providing a platform from which I-Kiribati women can speak in public.[70] The authors caution contemporary I-Kiribati women, 'the respect is coming, but women still need to be modest and respect traditional attitudes in order to be able to progress'.[71] While Ngaebi, Russell and Tamuera provide a critical analysis of the status of I-Kiribati women, the chapter is restricted to contemporary examples from the early 1990s.[72]

Sister Alaima Talu in her 1992 paper 'The role of women in the development of Kiribati'[73] published in *Pacific History: papers from the eighth Pacific History Association Conference* edited by Donald Rubinstein has been the only author to explicitly mention the role of women in politics in Kiribati, however this is limited to one paragraph. Talu's article provides a brief historical overview of changes and developments to Kiribati society. Beginning with a description of traditional gender roles, Talu attributes changes to customary society as a response to European contact. She describes these impacts and changes with an emphasis on their effects on everyday women's lives. For example, Talu highlights the role of missionaries in Kiribati in introducing Western forms of education. Initially only

---

[70] ibid., p 268

[71] Interestingly, all three authors have been involved in political campaigns in Kiribati, perhaps explaining the difference of opinion between them and Rite Teatoa Tira. All three women were candidates in the 1991 general election, in which Ngaebi and Russell unsuccessfully contested seats in South Tarawa while Tamuera unsuccessfully tried to retain her seat for Butaritari. Mrs Russell was the first I-Kiribati to be elected to the House of Parliament in 1971..

[72] Further examples of contemporary issues facing I-Kiribati women can be found in the extensive body of literature comprising annual reports, government documents, policy development reports, international agency consultancies, regional reports and non-government organisation research papers that also discuss and critique the status of women in Kiribati. While these reports and papers are significant, they consider current issues and do not provide a critical historical analysis of events.

[73] Talu, Sister A. (1992). The role of women in the development of Kiribati.In D. H. Rubinstein (Ed.), *Pacific history: Papers from the 8th Pacific History Association Conference* (pp. 177-182). Guam: University of Guam Press and Micronesian Area Research Centre

boys were permitted to attend schools, while the girls stayed at home to help with daily chores, however eventually girls were allowed to attend. The consequence of this, Talu argues, was that education allowed women to become 'active members not only in the village but in the nation at large'[74] through employment and politics. Talu traces the chronological development of women's roles as emerging from the domestic sphere and entering the public realm. She asserts that while some headway has been made, '[i]t remains to be realised that women can also represent their islands and their nation'.[75] Like Rite Teatoa Tira, Ngaebi, Russell and Tamuera, the prominence of women's clubs and organisations in promoting women's status is argued by Talu. While Talu provides an historical summary of women's development, her argument overlooks women's role during decolonisation and does not venture into any substantial analysis of women in national discussions in Kiribati.[76] [77]

Gender in the Pacific

Understanding gender relations in Kiribati is paramount in an analysis of women's participation in contemporary history. Alexandra Brewis (1996) *Lives on the Line: Women and Ecology on a Pacific Atoll* is a case study based on extensive fieldwork

[74] Talu, A., op. cit., p 178
[75] Ibid., p 181
[76] As this was not the aim of her paper, rather she investigated, as the title suggests, 'The role of women in the development of Kiribati'.
[77] More recently, Talu has written a Master's Thesis on the role of the Catholic Church in the education of girls.

on the Kiribati island of Butaritari which explores women's sexuality and fertility.[78] Brewis provides a delicate understanding of gender relations according to Kiribati culture and issues facing women, such as domestic violence, in a culture which positions women as secondary to men. In particular, Brewis explores how I-Kiribati women see themselves within the dynamics of their society and environment, through the framework of an anthropological case study. Other important literary works to consider are Roddy Cordon's memoirs *Seven Years Island Hopping Volumes 1 and 2*.[7980] Cordon tells of her experiences living and working in the Gilbert Islands in the late 1960s and early 1970s as the first appointed Woman Education Officer, for the Colony Government in Tarawa. Cordon provides a glimpse of colonial life during the 1970s and a personal description of working with the women of Kiribati from the perspective of a colonial official.

Poetry also provides insight into the personal experiences of women, particularly in the Pacific where Western academic texts largely ignore Indigenous and women's perspectives. Teweiariki Teaero is one of Kiribati's most renowned poets and has published an anthology of his work in *Waa in Storms* (2004).[81] While he does not explore the theme of gender, through his poetry he provides personal reflections on problems regarding his family, his country and of regional and global importance. In 2003, the Pacific literary journal *Mana* published an anthology of poetry and short fiction written by the Kiribati Writers Association as well as high

---

[78] Brewis, A. (1996). *Lives on the line: Women and ecology on a Pacific atoll.* London: Harcourt Brace.
[79] Cordon, R. (1996). *Seven years island hopping volume 1*. Lincolnshire: Cordon and Wood Eagle.
[80] Cordon, R. (1998). *Seven years island hopping volume 2*. Lincolnshire: Cordon and Wood Eagle.
[81] Teaeroi, T. (2004). *Waa in Storms.* Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

school and university students.[82] As with the work of Teweiariki Teaero, these poems offer insight into I-Kiribati worldviews. The work of I-Kiribati academic Kambati Uriam 'In their Own Words: History and Society in Gilbertese Oral Tradition, is also significant.[83]

While the literature on women in Kiribati is limited, the existing body of work on gender in the Pacific; the collection of histories of the Pacific women's movement along with anthropological writings on the agency of Pacific women's groups as well as case studies from the region provide a framework from which to understand and present women's roles in contemporary Kiribati history. Margaret Jolly is a leading academic in the field of gender in the Pacific. Her edited works include *Family and gender in the Pacific: domestic contradictions and the colonial impact* (1989) (edited jointly with Martha Macintyre),[84] *Maternities and modernities: colonial and postcolonial experiences in Asia and the Pacific* (1998) (edited jointly with Kalpana Ram)[85] and *Borders of being: citizenship, fertility, and sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* (2001) (also jointly edited with Kalpana Ram).[86] These texts explore an anthropological and historical perspective of women's issues in the Asia-Pacific region. The approach they use is adopted in order to provide a contextual and

---

[82] Teingiia, T., Rokete, T., & Crowl, L., (2003). *Mana: Kiribati Special: A South Pacific Journal of Art and Culture, Language and Literature,* 13(2). Suva, Fiji: South Pacific Creative Arts Society and Mana Publications.

[83] Uriam, K. (1995) *In their own words: history and society in Gilbertese oral tradition.* Canberra: The Journal of Pacific History

[84] Jolly, M., & Macintyre, M. (Eds.), (1989). *Family and gender in the Pacific: Domestic contradictions and the colonial impact*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[85] Ram, K, & Jolly, M. (Ed.), (1998). *Maternities and modernities: Colonial and postcolonial experiences in Asia and the Pacific*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[86] Ram, K, & Jolly, M. (Eds.), (2001). *Borders of being: Citizenship, fertility, and sexuality in Asia and the Pacific.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

theoretical background to a study of I-Kiribati women during decolonisation. Histories of the Pacific women's movement, while typically limited to chapters within larger anthologies on the international and global women's movement, describe distinct trends unique to the Pacific region. Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea in her chapter titled 'Women and Political Leadership in the Pacific Islands' (1994)[87] offered an overview of the development of women in the political domain and highlighted underlying historical impacts which have hindered or assisted women's political development (for example the beneficial and detrimental effects of the Christian missionary movement on Pacific Island women). The chapter drew on examples from across the Pacific with particular emphasis on a comparison of the position of Melanesian women compared to their Polynesian and Micronesian counterparts. No explicit mention of Kiribati is made and while a brief overview of the political successes of women in Micronesia is discussed (and Kiribati is geographically a part of Micronesia), due to differing colonial histories, demographic and social distinctions, custom as well as Kiribati's relative remoteness and isolation from other Micronesian states[88], trends in Micronesia do not draw any distinct similarities to the I-Kiribati experience. Griffen's chapter on 'The Pacific Women's Movement'[89] in *Sisterhood is Global* traces the historical

[87].Schoeffel Meleisea, P. (1994). Women and political leadership in the Pacific Islands. In C. Daley & M. Nolan (Eds.), *Suffrage and beyond: International feminist perspectives* (pp. 107-123). Auckland: Auckland University Press.

[88] Kiribati has a greater history of engagement with Tuvalu, Hawai'i and Samoa – Polynesian regions and in contemporary histories, with Fiji – considered a Melanesian region. Therefore the majority of I-Kiribati typically do not identify as Micronesian

[89] Griffen, V. (1984). The Pacific Women's Movement. In R. Morgan (Ed.), *Sisterhood is global: The International Women's Movement anthology*. New York: Doubleday.

development of the Pacific movement from an author's perspective.[90] Similarly, Ralston's 1992 journal article 'The Study of Women in the Pacific',[91] published in *The Contemporary Pacific* also provides an overview of the status of Pacific Island women. In 1990, Anne Woods compiled an annotated bibliography of Pacific Island women's issues between the years 1982 and 1989. This represents a growing acknowledgment of the absence of women's voices in the historical record.

Zohl de Ishtar (1994) *Daughters of the Pacific* provides an overview of issues concerning women in the Pacific.[92] Most importantly, Zohl de Ishtar provides a platform from which Indigenous women from Oceania can be heard. Based on interviews, Zohl de Ishtar weaves long quotes within her text, allowing the women's stories and statements to be read in full and guide the author's writing, rather than the author manipulating the quotes to support her own argument. This format also reflects traditional oral history through storytelling and allows the women's words to be written in their own context, rather than moulded and assimilated into Western terms of reference. Interestingly, de Ishtar quotes an I-Kiribati woman, Binatia Iakobo, advocating women's voices to be heard. Iakobo is recorded as stating in 1989 (just ten years after independence), '[w]omen talk, men have always had their say, so it is about time women talked about their lives'.[93] While de Ishatar does not focus on Kiribati, *Daughters of the Pacific* provides an example of re-

---

[90] Vanessa Griffen is a strong advocate for women's rights within the Pacific and was highly active in mobilising Pacific women in the 1970s and initiating the regional movement.

[91] Ralston, C. (1992). The study of women in the Pacific. *The Contemporary Pacific*, Spring, pp 162-175.

[92] de Ishtar, Z. (1994) *Daughters of the Pacific*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

[93] Binatia Iakobo cited in de Ishtar, op. cit.

writing history inclusive of women and in their own words, thereby acting as a model for a history of I-Kiribati.

Among Pacific women, the literature suggests there is a general assumption feminism is a Western term and therefore only relevant to the lives of Western women. A distinction has been created in which Western feminists are seen as individualistic, anti-family, anti-men and anti-children while Pacific women uphold their traditional values such as the importance of her role in the family and in motherhood. As Margaret Jolly warns:

> these binaries…saturate the writing of much anthropology and history of the Pacific; they pervade the perceptions of many Pacific people, who routinely distinguish themselves and their ways of being from *Pakeha, haole, paplangi, caldoches, waet man, aisalsaliri* (or in the case of Kiribati, *i-matang).* There are many articulations of Occidentalism in the Pacific that reify an imagined West or "whiteness" typified by individualism and materialism in opposition to an imagined Pacific way of communalism and spirituality. Such strong contrasts are routinely found too in distinction between Western and Pacific women's movements where the first is imputed to be individualistic and antagonistic toward men while the latter is seen to stress community and gender complementarity, and often refuses the label *feminist.*[94]

At a conference held in 1989 entitled 'Women, development and empowerment: a Pacific feminist perspective', workshops and discussions were held in an attempt to unravel these binaries and in doing so redefine feminism in Pacific terms relevant to and empowering for Pacific women. To achieve this, participants were first asked to explain what they believed feminism to mean. There followed a heated exchange of beliefs and ideas. The participants explained that the term itself was

---

[94] Jolly, M. (2005). Beyond the horizon? Nationalisms, feminisms, and globalization in the Pacific. *Ethnohistory, 52*(1), p. 139

an English word and therefore a foreign introduced concept. The women felt that there was only a vague understanding of what the term actually implied. Pacific women believed it to be anti-man and anti-family. Stemming from beliefs held since the first Pacific Women's Conference in 1975, the Women's Liberation movement was portrayed as a white women's movement and therefore not relevant to the lives of Indigenous women. One of the most controversial issues raised and a statement which was highly contested was the belief that feminism was a struggle against discrimination, yet many Pacific women asserted that they were not discriminated against in their own cultures, rather their traditions secured power bases for women.[95]

Using the Pacific feminist approach of the 1989 women's conference as a framework, the gender stereotypes in Kiribati can be challenged, creating a redefinition of women's position and status. This Pacific feminist approach is a redefinition of Western feminism which is appropriate and relevant to Pacific women and encourages a 'greater sharing, a greater sisterhood'[96] of women regionally. A feminist perspective 'challenges androcentric narratives by recovering women's roles in history and taking fuller account of women's views and experiences'.[97] Adopting this approach to an historical analysis has as argued by Sharon Tiffany in 'Politics and gender in Pacific Island societies: a feminist critique of

---

[95] Griffen, V. (Ed.), with Yee Joan. (1989). *Women, development and empowerment: A Pacific feminist perspective*. A report of the Pacific Women's Workshop, Naboutini, Fiji, 23-26 March, 1987. Kuala Lumpur: Asian and Pacific Development Centre, pp. 19-22

96 Ibid., p. 20

97 Cockerton, C. (1999). Women. In M. Rapaport (Ed.), *The Pacific Islands: Environment and society* (pp.305 – 314). Bess Press., p. 305

the anthropology of power' (1987)[98] enables one to re-write anthropological histories of women as active agents.

Women in Development

Development literature from the 1980s began to position women and argued for their inclusion in national plans. This literature attempted to raise awareness of the important role women needed to play in development, provided data to illustrate the unequal impact of previous development approaches on women (previously emphasis on male inclusion to the exclusion of women) and put forth recommendations for improvement. This body of literature was largely written by women and increasingly by Indigenous Pacific women. Edited works such as *Women in Development in the South Pacific* (1985)[99] and *Development in the Pacific: What Women Say* (1986)[100] were influential in facilitating this shift in attitude towards women and development in the Pacific.

Helen Hughes in her chapter 'Women in the development of the South Pacific observed in 1985, 'Pacific island countries have been among the slowest growing of

[98] Tiffany, S. W. (1987). Politics and gender in Pacific Island societies: A feminist critique of the anthropology of power. *Women's Studies*, *13*, pp 333-355.
[99] Cole, R. V., et. al., (1985) *Women in development of the South Pacific: Barriers and Opportunities.* Canberra: Development Studies, The Australian National University.
[100] Nesbit, J., et. al. (1986) *Development in the Pacific: What Women Say*, Canberra: A Development Dossier, Australian Council for Overseas Aid

all developing economies'[101]… and 'women have a disproportionately onerous role in the maintenance and improvement of living standards in the Pacific and they receive only a relatively small share of the benefits'.[102] Similarly, the Introduction to *Development in the Pacific: What women say* (1986), a Development Dossier produced by the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, contends:

> In a region where millions are spent on aid and development, women's basic needs remain invisible and unmet. There is no shortage of information about development and women in the Pacific but rather a lack of real commitment by governments to recognise women's views and experience in development planning.[103]

Women's groups were identified in this early literature as social structures best placed to assist in the implementation of targeted development plans for women. *Development in the Pacific: What women say* observes:

> There have always been active women's groups in the Pacific. With such rapid socio-economic change facing Pacific people, there has been a growing awareness that these groups must link up and form networks to support women's work. Only when women themselves organise to voice their needs and rights can there develop an effective lobby for the support of government and non-government organisations. This is happening in village women's groups and provincial and national councils of women. Regional focal points collect and disseminate information on women's status in the sectors of health, employment and education.[104]

Development literature recognised the role of women's clubs as potential facilitators of change and that of women as demonstrating agency and ownership

---

[101] Hughes, H. (1985), Women in development of the South Pacific In Cole, R. V., et. al., (1985) *Women in development of the South Pacific: Barriers and Opportunities,* (pp. 3-10) Canberra: Development Studies, The Australian National University, 3
[102] Ibid., p 4
[103] Nesbit, J., et. al., (1986), Introduction, In Nesbit, J., et. al. *Development in the Pacific: What Women Say*, (pp. iv – v), Canberra: A Development Dossier, Australian Council for Overseas Aid.
[104] ibid

of their problems. Histories have largely neglected to include these perspectives and knowledge.

In an assessment of women's health committees in Western Samoa, Pamela Thomas explained that, 'All planned development is interventionist, intended to change political, social or economic structures through changing what people do or the ways in which they do it.'[105] Writing in the context of the mid-1980s, Thomas asserts:

> Until recently most development has been concerned with changing what men do and little consideration has been given to either involving women in the development process or to the impact of male-dominated development programmes on the lives of women.[106]

Furthermore, she argues, 'Project planners seldom considered the ways in which indigenous social, political and economic structures may influence the implementation and effectiveness of intervention'.[107] She also highlights the failure of studies to consider the 'long-term impact of indigenous social systems on development projects, or the ways in which women's beliefs and their patterns of behaviour influence the ways in which development projects are implemented at village-level'.[108]

---

[105] Thomas, P. (1986), 'Women and Development – A Two-edged Sword', In Nesbit, J., et. al. *Development in the Pacific: What Women Say*, (pp. 1-17), Canberra: A Development Dossier, Australian Council for Overseas Aid, p. 1
[106] ibid.
[107] ibid.
[108] ibid.

Her study explores the way in which introduced programs and health initiatives were negotiated and appropriated into traditional Samoan social structures. Thomas concludes:

> Any village-level development project introduces new patterns of organisation and behaviour. If innovations are to be accepted by village people it is likely that they will be adapted to conform in some way to existing values and patterns of organisations.[109]

The literature suggests that women's groups were a focus of interest in the late 1970s and early 1980s and were identified as facilitators of social and economic change in the immediate post-independence period. From the 1990s the literature suggests a shift. In a period where development approaches were advocating for greater changes of women and for women to challenge and break down patriarchal barriers to their development and empowerment, village-based women's clubs continued to pursue a mainly home economics curriculum. As a result, interest in research of women's groups in the 1990s waned. There was resurgence in the early 2000s with the journal *Oceania* dedicating a special edition on women's groupings in Melanesia. These articles were written by women with the majority authored by Indigenous Pacific women. The perception of Church-based women's clubs was that they were not progressive and were resistant to development approaches that sought to position women beyond the home. Church-based groups were seen as conservative and traditional, resistant to change. Writing in 2003 on women's fellowships in 2003, Douglas identified the neglect of women's groups in development literature of the late 1990s and early 2000s in the following way:

---

[109] ibid. p 16

> the unfashionable conjunction of women with parochial Christianity means that, with a few exceptions, local Church women's groups are seriously underrepresented in anthropological, feminist, and by development literature and largely ignored by aid organizations.[110]

Key articles from the 2003 *Oceania* special edition relevant to a study of Kiribati women, included Alice Aruhe'eta Pollard's journal article 'Women's organizations, voluntarism, and self-financing in Solomon Islands: a participant perspective'[111] and Regina Scheyvens discussion on women's groups in the Solomon Islands in her 2003 article, 'Church groups and the Empowerment of women in Solomon Islands'.[112]

Pollard's article is of particular interest as it explores how the women of the Solomon Islands, like I-Kiribati women, use women's organisations as a means of political expression and development. As in Kiribati, custom has contributed to the silencing of women within the public sphere. Women's groups provide and continue to provide a platform from which women can have some form of political expression and a meeting place to discuss issues of concern. Pollard explains the aim of her article was:

> to demonstrate the capabilities, resourcefulness, and resilience of women in Solomon Islands and underline their significant but neglected national potential by focusing on a key domain of women's practice and management expertise – women's groups and organizations.'[113]

---

[110] . Douglas, B. (2003b). Christianity, tradition, and everyday modernity: towards an anatomy of women's groupings in Melanesia. In B. Douglas (Ed.), *Women's Groups and Everyday Modernity in Melanesia,* Special Issue. *Oceania, 74*, p, 14.

[111] Pollard A. A. (2003) Women's organizations, voluntarism, and self-financing in Solomon Islands: a participant perspective. In B. Douglas (Ed.), *Women's groups and everyday modernity in Melanesia.* Special Issue, *Oceania, 74*, pp 44 - 60

[112] Scheyvens, R. (2003). Church groups and the empowerment of women in Solomon Islands. In B. Douglas (Ed.), *Women's groups and everyday modernity in Melanesia.* Special Issue, *Oceania, 74*, pp 24-43.

[113] Pollard, op. cit., p 45

She argues that 'though women evidently have much to offer the nation, they have so far generally been absent from provincial and national levels of government and administration'.[114] This is also true for women of Kiribati. By providing a brief history of women's status and development in the Solomon Islands, Pollard sets the scene for the emergence of women's groups. Pollard argues that the concept of women's groups was not foreign to Solomon Island women, rather, historically women have consistently met together to engage in recreational activities, rituals and to work.[115] She argued that the introduction of Christianity has brought with it a double edged sword – oppression by affirming women as mothers and wives, and liberation by encouraging women's education and training and ultimately, supporting women's groups.[116] Most importantly, Pollard presents women as political, both in historical and contemporary settings, and as active participants in their communities. Furthermore, Pollard infers that the daily life of Solomon Island women is political.

In comparison, Regina Scheyvens discusses women's groups in the Solomon Islands in her 2003 article, 'Church groups and the Empowerment of women in Solomon Islands'. Scheyvens investigates two approaches of development of women. She compares and contrasts the welfare and empowerment approach used in women's groups and the impacts both have had (and continue to have) on the women of the Solomon Islands. Of most importance to an analysis of I-Kiribati women, Scheyvens

[114] ibid.
[115] ibid., p 46
[116] ibid., p 47

provides an overview of historical development of women's status. Like Pollard, Scheyvens asserts women's agency both throughout history and in modern Solomon Islands. In contrast to Pollard, Scheyvens invokes stronger language; in particular, Scheyvens explores the theme of women's oppression. She argues that Solomon Island women have been historically, and continue to be, oppressed and marginalised within their communities. Scheyvens asserts that while some women may not agree:

> that many Solomon Islands women do see themselves as oppressed in certain respects and want to overcome that oppression. While they may not use Western academic language to name their subordination, nonetheless, by identifying concerns such as lack of control over communally-held land, their safety in their own homes, and the lack of women to represent their views in political spheres, women are identifying gender inequities as key areas of concern for them.[117]

She argues that the welfare approach only furthers women's oppression, whereas an empowerment approach aims more at emancipating women. Scheyvens, in this analysis, draws from Caroline Moser's Gender and Development framework.[118] Scheyvens argues the focus of an empowerment approach is:

> to enhance women's life choices: to achieve certain long term changes including transformation of the subordinate relationship of women to men: to activate a change in consciousness among women: and to increase women's influence over decision-making processes in all social contexts'.[119]

While both Scheyvens and Pollard discuss predominantly contemporary issues facing women of the Solomon Islands, their historical overviews and societal critiques assist in positioning the attitudes, fears, concerns and desires of I-Kiribati

---

[117] Scheyvens, op. cit., p 27
[118] Moser, C. (1993). *Gender planning and development: Theory, practice and training.* London: Routledge.
[119] ibid.

women during decolonisation. Furthermore, Scheyvens and Pollard's discussions on women's groups as political provide a comparative tool in an investigation of the role of women's groups in Kiribati during decolonisation and whether or not they provided a political outlet for I-Kiribati women.

Due to limited research on women in development in Kiribati, case studies from elsewhere in Asia-Pacific are an important comparative tool in examining social trends. Other key case studies relevant to this study include Jolly's *Women of the place: kastom, colonialism, and gender in Vanuatu* (1994) which provides a model for examining women in Kiribati. Other case studies on gender include Beatrice Avalos's 1994 study on *Women and development in Papua New Guinea*, Marilyn Taleo Havini and Josephine Sirivi's 2004 book *As Mothers of the Land: the birth of the Bougainville Women for peace and freedom*.

Women and education

Opportunities for women and girls to be educated are crucial to women's development. The literature reveals that, in general, girls and women within the Pacific have historically been at a disadvantage in terms of access to education at primary, secondary and tertiary level. At primary level, authors observed that if families have to choose, the preference is to send sons over daughters, which

means that 'girls are doubly disadvantaged'.[120] Hughes confirms this, observing 'Families spend their limited cash resources on the education of boys rather than of girls'.[121] Overall, by the mid-1980s, the impact of informal adult education of women was beginning to be considered in development literature. Maree Keating and Lyn Melville notes that by 1986:

> the situation for Pacific women has improved slightly in the areas of both formal and informal education and this has introduced new possibilities and opportunities for women. For example, needs-based, informal, non-academic vernacular education for rural women represents a movement of the educational process away from the urban, prestigious educational centre towards rural, working majority.[122]

Similarly, Hughes notes, 'Informal, mainly adult education for women is not well developed in the Pacific. Present schemes largely focus on domestic skills, such as the use of improved stoves, and women's groups' income-earning efforts such as chicken-raising'.[123] While beneficial, Hughes argues that more needed to be done in terms of adult education of women, such as curriculum that encompassed 'training in family and basic skills such as reading, writing, arithmetic, bookkeeping, family and business law and so on, and to enable women to compete commercially and to take part in political life'.[124] Penelope Schoeffel's chapter 'The Rice Pudding Syndrome: Women's advancement and home economic training in the South Pacific' critiqued regional home economics training as a Eurocentric imposition that failed to consider traditional knowledges such as foods and ways of cooking.

---

[120] Keating, M. & Melville, L. (1986), Aid and Development Issues in the Pacific, In Nesbit, J., et. al. *Development in the Pacific: What Women Say*, (pp. 69-78), Canberra: A Development Dossier, Australian Council for Overseas Aid, p. 70
[121] Hughes, op. cit., p 6
[122] Keating & Melville, op. cit., p 70
[123] Hughes, op. cit., p 6
[124] ibid., p 7

Schoeffel argues that the welfare approach to development through the home economics curriculum provided limited benefits as it fostered a reliance on imported foods that were costly. She argues for programs that extended beyond sewing classes.[125] Grace Molisa makes the point that government-based women's interests programs in Vanuatu did not address the needs of women but were designed around 'the satisfaction of man's stomach and the quality craftsmanship which went into decorating his attire'.[126]

In terms of access to higher and tertiary educational opportunities, the literature asserts,

> A common concern is that few women are graduating from, or even enrolling in, tertiary education and there is a consequent lack of trained women in the trades and professions. This means that the staffing and leadership needs of grassroots level training programs are not able to be met. When girls do enter tertiary education it is generally in the fields of arts, domestic science, secretarial studies or education.'[127]

Hughes notes, girls in formal education are largely under-represented[128] and that there is a tendency for girls to be 'pushed into 'women's subjects such as domestic 'science', typing, shorthand and nursing rather than being encouraged to enter the professions'.[129] She argues two sides, 'some of these skills are very

---

[125] Schoeffel Meleisea, P. (1986). The rice pudding syndrome: Women's advancement and home economics training in the South Pacific. In Nesbit, J., et. al. *Development in the Pacific: What Women Say*, (pp. 36-44), Canberra: A Development Dossier, Australian Council for Overseas Aid.
[126] Molisa, G. M. (1985), Vanuatu's women's development since independence In Cole, R. V., et. al., *Women in development of the South Pacific: Barriers and Opportunities,* (pp. 215-218) Canberra: Development Studies, The Australian National University, p. 216
[127] ibid.
[128] Hughes, op. cit., p 5
[129] ibid., p 6

worthwhile…women in the Pacific are often better trained vocationally than men, although this is not reflected in their salaries'.[130]

In terms of histories of Christianity in the Pacific, Charles Forman (1982) *The Island Churches of the South Pacific: Emergence in the Twentieth Century*[131] and his Chapter 'Sing to the Lord a New Song: Women in the Churches of Oceania' (1987)[132] provide a regional overview of the indigenisation process of Island Churches and positions the role of women in this process. Also of note are the works of John Garrett (1997)[133] and the edited collection *Island Churches: Challenges and Change*.[134]

The published literature on decolonisation, gender, development, adult education of women and history therefore provides a comparative, global framework for the study of women in the contemporary history of Kiribati. A collage comprising of post-independence, Indigenous and feminist methodology may also be borrowed from the existing literature and applied in the case of the development of women's clubs in the former Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. A review of the literature, above all, reveals significant gaps and provides an argument for Kiribati women's voices and experience to be given primacy in the historical record.

---

[130] ibid

[131] Forman, C. (1982). *The island churches of the South Pacific: Emergence in the twentieth centur*y. New York: Orbis Books.

[132] Forman, C. (1987). 'Sing to the Lord a New Song': Women in the Churches of Oceania. In D. O'Brien and S. W. Tiffany (Eds.), *Rethinking women's roles: Perspectives from the Pacific* (pp.153-172). Berkeley: University of California Press.

[133] Garrett, J. (1997) *Where nets were cast: Christianity in Oceania since World War II*. Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific

[134] Charles Forman (Ed) (1992) *Island Churches: Challenge and Change*. Suva, Fiji: Pacific Theological College

Chapter 3

Methodological approaches and reflections on fieldwork

Methodological approaches[135]

As a non-Indigenous researcher engaged in a study which gives primacy to Indigenous knowledges, I am aware of the pitfalls of using Western methodologies in historical research and writing. Therefore, I chose to develop a methodology which is an adaptation of traditional modes of historical research and writing, influenced by feminist literature and a postcolonial research approach. My rationale for modifying a Western methodology was due to the inadequacies and limitations that arise when trying to apply Western concepts and frameworks to an interpretation of Indigenous knowledges.[136] The objectives of a Western methodological approach is 'to separate the true from the false'.[137] A Western framework of conventional narrative historical research and writing is based on the ability of the historian to be 'objective', 'distanced from the event' and to be the bearer of 'truth'.[138] The underlying themes of 'finding the truth' and being

[135] This section builds on the methodological approaches used in my honour's research project (See Rose (2005), op.cit.)
[136] Walker, P. (2003). Colonising research: academia's structural violence towards Indigenous Peoples. *Social Alternatives*, *2*(3), p 39.
[137] Furay C. and Salevouris M. J. (Eds.), (2000). *The methods and skills of history: A practical guide* (2nd ed.). Wheeling: Harlan Davidson Inc., p 147.
[138] Furay & Salevouris, Eds, op. cit., pp 147-8; Jordanova, L. (2000). *History in practice*. London: Hodder Headline Group, pp 85-6.

'objective' often deny emotive language, silence Indigenous voices and reinforce colonial institutions and ideologies.[139] In particular, in objectifying people and their stories, 'study objects…become victims of cultural mortifications'.[140] As applying a Western methodology to my study defeats the purpose, a research approach influenced by feminist theory and postcolonial literature has been adopted.

A feminist approach challenges traditional methods of historical research and writing. S. Jay Kleinberg explains:

> [o]ne significant contribution of women's studies to the discipline of history has been to challenge the form of emphasis of tradition history by the use of gender as a category of historical analysis…Alternative approaches have been proposed towards a redefinition of historical concepts resulting from a new perception of women as active agents of change.[141]

Using 'gender as a category of historical analysis' calls for a rethinking of the 'institutions and events which have been the traditional objects of historical inquiry'.[142] Kleinberg claims in order to achieve this, the definitions of work, family, politics and ideology need to be broadened. Particularly relevant to a history

---

[139] Walker, op. cit., p 39; hooks, b (2004). Culture to culture: Ethnography and cultural studies as critical intervention. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Approaches to qualitative research: a reader in theory and practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 154; Dillard, C. B. (2000). The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen: Examining an endarkened feminist epistemology in educational research and leadership. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 13*(6), p 662.
[140] Ryen, A. (2000). Colonial methodology? Methodological challenges to cross-cultural projects. In B. Humphries, D. M. Mertens and C. Truman (Eds.), *Research and inequality* (pp. 220-235). London: UCL Press, p 228.
[141] Kleinberg S. J. (Ed.), (1998). *Retrieving women's history: Changing perceptions of the role of women in politics and society.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp vii – viii.
[142] Kleinberg S.J. (1998) 'Introduction', In Kleinberg S.J. (ed) *Retrieving women's History: changing perceptions of the role of women in politics and society* Oxford; UNESCO Press, p x.

inclusive of I-Kiribati women is a broadening of politics to include 'both formal and informal political movements and activities'.[143] Kleinberg suggests:

> '[b]y examining female political participation we may uncover informal but nonetheless real areas of power and expand our understanding of the relationship between the private and public sectors. This, in turn, may lead to a re-evaluation of what politics is.[144]

Similarly, Weisner-Hanks argues the need for 'the recognition that anything in a society having to do with power relationships, not simply formal politics or organised groups, is political'.[145] To argue women's contribution in the decolonisation process in Kiribati, one must first assess broader themes of re-writing histories inclusive of women. Gender theory in historical writing is applied to provide a framework of analysis to I-Kiribati women. Merry E Wiesner-Hanks 2001, *Gender in History*[146] explores theoretical underpinnings of re-writing history inclusive of women. Wiesner-Hanks investigates the terminology of 'gender', 'women' and 'sex' and the consequences of applying such terms to history. Wiesner-Hanks develops a history of gender, and critiques the 'origins of patriarchy'. Her review of historical methodologies is of most assistance. Weisner-Hanks provides a chronology of the development of historical methodological approaches, and the change in social thinking that precipitated them. Particularly, she discusses Critical Race Theory, and the development in the mid-1990s of

[143] ibid., p xi.
[144] ibid., p x.
[145] Wiesner-Hanks, M. (2001). *Gender in history*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers
[146] ibid., p 146

multiple lines of difference, including Critical Race Feminism and postcolonial feminism.[147]

These arguments are not new - the slogan 'the personal is political' has long been used by the feminist movement – and are supported by an extensive body of literature. How these arguments have modified historical methodology is of importance. Emphasis on written records as sources of historical inquiry, such as Colonial reports, diaries, memoirs, censuses and the like, is problematic for historians of women's histories, as these records often downplay women's roles. Re-evaluating traditional sources as well as 'generating new questions and expanding the sources we use to answer them'[148] are key steps in developing an interpretive framework which uses gender as a category of historical analysis. Applying these methods to my own research will result in a re-evaluation of archival resources and an expansion of source material to include oral histories, song, dance, poems and other ways in which I-Kiribati women preserve and transfer knowledge.

To assist in expanding source materials, themes within postcolonial literature, such as subjectivity and primacy of Indigenous knowledges, emotive language and personal experiences are explored. This approach is influenced by the works of Polly Walker, Cora Weber-Pillwax, bell hooks, Cynthia Dillard and her study into the privileging of 'life notes' and Linda Tuhawi Smith. Dillard's discussion on 'life notes'-

[147] ibid., pp 8-9
[148] Kleinberg, op. cit., p xi.

short stories, poems, diaries and letters- explores the power behind these personal narratives to portray more realistic accounts. 'Life notes' is a useful concept for analysing women's experiences in the decolonisation context because it legitimises stories and oral histories as historical records. In privileging 'life notes', Dillard dismisses Western modes of research which detach the researcher from the researched and produce allegedly 'objective' texts. In Dillard's view, 'objective' texts are a myth, for 'all research is social construction and a cultural endeavor'.[149]

Applying Western viewpoints to an interpretation of Kiribati histories would not produce a study that would justly represent Indigenous voices. Therefore I chose a methodology of historical research and writing whereby gender is the category of analysis, adopting themes within a postcolonial research approach to help expand and legitimise source materials. My reason for choosing this approach was to ethically give primacy to Indigenous perspectives of history.

Methods used in fieldwork

The methodology I adopted as a part of my fieldwork is based on ethnographic methods such as open-ended discussions, semi-structured interviews and informal group discussions.[150] I conducted individual interviews with leaders of women's groups, past and present, as well as former female politicians. I also conducted

[149] Dillard, op. cit., p 662.
[150] See O'Reilly, K. (2005). *Ethnographic methods.* London: Routledge; Fife, W. (2005). *Doing fieldwork: Ethnographic methods for research in developing countries and beyond*. New York; Palgrave Macmillan.

informal, open-ended group discussions with members of women's groups as well as local women. Interviews with I-Kiribati men (community and Church leaders) were conducted as a comparative tool to investigate if there was a difference of opinion of women's roles during this period.

During data collection and in ongoing correspondence, I used an emancipatory research approach, influenced by critical theory and feminist theory. An emancipatory research approach is based on four key elements:

a) Locating the 'self' in the research process in terms of personal, social and institutional influences on research and analysis
b) Exploring the political/power dimensions of empowerment
c) Being explicit about the tensions that arise in research and relating as much about how the tensions remain as about how they were resolved
d) Linking research to wider questions of social inequality/ social justice.[151]

These four elements require the researcher to respect and be responsible to the researched. It allows for subjectivity and reminds the researcher that inequality is inherent in typical research processes. An emancipatory research approach acknowledges these inherent inequalities and urges the researcher to examine their position in the process and to be constantly aware of and keep in check the different manifestations of power relations, tensions, biasness and how knowledge is traded. For example, positioning myself within the research process allowed acknowledgement of my biasness and predicts gaps, limitations or tensions that may arise due to this bias. Locating the self in research also allowed for

[151] Humphries, B., Mertens, D. M., & Truman, C. (2000). Arguments for an 'emancipatory' research paradigm. In B. Humphries, D. M. Mertens & C. Truman (Eds.), *Research and Inequality* (pp. 3-23). London: UCL Press, p 9

acknowledgement of alternative and subversive views and the space to write as a participant and as audience.

Anne Ryen claims the problem unique to all cross-cultural research is an imbalance and that this imbalance 'is in favour of the researcher and Western countries'.[152] Limitations within cross-cultural research may not necessarily be able to be resolved. Rather 'awareness of the specific challenges inherent in cross-cultural research' and as mentioned, 'being explicit about the tensions that arise in research and relating as much about how the tensions remain as about how they were resolved' are 'vital and necessary if the results of the project intended to benefit those studied'.[153]

Reflections on fieldwork

My fieldwork consisted of three visits to South Tarawa, Kiribati. During the first, from May to June in 2007, I spent a period of five weeks on Tarawa and one week conducting archival research in Suva, Fiji. In March 2008 I spent four weeks in Tarawa and a further six weeks in 2009 during March and April, followed by one week in Suva, Fiji. I also conducted archival research in Suva in December 2008.

In 2007, I was based at the AMAK (National Council of Women (NCW)) headquarters. At the beginning of my research project, my scope included

[152] Ryen, op. cit., p 232.
[153] ibid. pp 232-3.

developments in women's interests from the 1945 to 2000s. After approaching the President of the NCW, I was granted position to be based at AMAK and was allowed access to their records (from 1995 onwards as the older records were 'lost' or located at the *Irekenrao* headquarters where I was allowed limited access). I also spent time at the Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) archives located at the OLSH convent in Teoereoreke. I spent the majority of my time observing the daily running of the AMAK. The National Council of Women (NCW), the executive arm of AMAK, and the administration allowed me to be based within the AMAK Office. I was able to meet members of AMAK which included the NCW and affiliated members including *Irekenrao, Teitoingaina*, RAK and other faith-based women's organisations, teacher's groups and Girl Guides. I was also able to observe how the AMAK functioned as a space for women's needs (for example access to legal advice on family matters and women's rights) as well as a headquarters for the NCW (and their monthly meetings) and the coordination of the Women's Interest Workers (WIW) and the women's movement as a whole. Being based at AMAK allowed me to observe its administration and coordination, access archives and meet key leaders of the women's movement. It also granted legitimacy to my position as a researcher.

In 2008 I timed fieldwork in order to attend International Women's Day (IWD) celebrations hosted by AMAK and the NCW. As my second visit to Kiribati, many women recognised and remembered me from my previous visit. I arrived the week prior to the beginning of IWD celebrations (IWD celebrations run for four days

including a public awareness raising campaign, sports day, combined Church service and a public holiday where a formal gathering of women takes place).

Image 4: President Tong speaking at the International Women's Day Celebration 2008

During the formal gathering on the public holiday, the President of AMAK/NCW introduced me as an Australian researcher based at AMAK. This legitimised my position among the women as a researcher however it also explicitly connected me to AMAK. This became an issue later in my research when I approached the

Catholic Women's Centre, *Teitoingaina*, for interviews. There seemed to be a misunderstanding that I worked for AMAK which made the Catholic women reticent to participate in an interview. Given past issues between the Catholic women and AMAK (explained in chapter 7), the Catholic women were reluctant to partake in my research project as they felt I would be bias towards AMAK's perspective on the women's interests movement. After discussing my ethics participatory consent form and outlining that I was an independent researcher and funded by my University and that AMAK had very generously allowed me to use their office as a space to work from and conduct interviews but I was not employed or tied to AMAK in any way, the Catholic women were then willing to allow me to interview their members.

In 2008, I spent the majority of my time going through the Kiribati National Archives based in Bairiki. The archives were limited to files from the Women's Interest Desk based at various times in either the Government Education, Health or Social Welfare (or equivalent) Departments (from 1945 to 1982). I also spent time at the World Health Organisation (WHO) Library at the Tungaru Hospital.I visited Tarawa for six weeks in March and April 2009, again for IWD. The contact with women over three year period (including face to face as well as email correspondence) created friendships.

In Fiji, I visited the Community Education and Training Centre (CETC) in Narere and discussed my research with the principal and administrative and teaching staff. I was then directed to the Secretariat for the Pacific Community Library in Nabua

where I accessed former records relating to women's development of the former South Pacific Commission (SPC). I also accessed the Pacific Collection at University of the South Pacific (USP) which held theses (mostly Masters) from the Pacific Theological College. I also visited PACFAW, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) and UNIFEM. I was able to arrange informal meetings with the Kiribati desk at UNIFEM, and the PACFAW and FWCC Coordinators. These meetings enabled me to gain a greater understanding of the wider Pacific women's movement.

Reflections on interviews

Interviews were conducted in an informal manner. My approach was to let the participants share what they felt they wanted to share with me as an *i-matang* researcher rather than conduct the interviews in a rigid manner whereby my questions would dictate the direction of the conversation. This informal approach allowed for the sharing and exchange of stories. Rather than relying on questions prepared in advance, I would begin each interview with my research aims (to trace the historical development of women's clubs and the women's interests movement) and then invite participants to share experiences that they felt would assist my research project. Once the interview commenced, I would then ask participants to expand on certain points of their story. For this reason, the term 'interview' does not adequately capture what I experienced as a researcher. To my mind, the 'interviews' were more akin to conversations. Participants would ask me questions of my own personal life as a means of gaining trust and understanding

my intentions as a researcher. On reflection, I shared with participants as many life experiences as participants shared with me. For this reason, I deliberately chose to cite these conversations as 'Personal Communication' as opposed to 'Interviews'.

This act of sharing and reciprocity was expanded to the sharing of skills, whereby, women participants would teach me certain skills such as weaving or dancing, and while we were participating in this activity, they would talk and reflect on their experiences and stories. In return, I shared my grandmother's recipes. On a typical day, I would spend the morning in the archives and then head to either the AMAK, RAK or Catholic Women's Centre where I would spend the afternoon either being taught how to weave or dance, or I would be in the Centre kitchen cooking and sharing recipes and stories. For interviews at participant's homes, I would bring a small gift of food which we would then share while talking over a cup of tea or green coconut.

Image 5: The Catholic Women's Training Centre

This approach to accessing information from interviews, while mutually enjoyable, was problematic when it came to fulfilling my University's ethical research requirements. To overcome this, when I first approached a participant, I would explicitly state that I would like to gain an understanding from them of their experiences within women's clubs and the women's movement. At this point, I would explain my research, what my intentions were, how my research project was funded and showed them my research consent form. We would then discuss the different points outlined in the form, such as whether or not they wished for their identity to be released and under what circumstances; whether they wished to be recorded and whether they would like a translator present. In many cases, female participants were very uncomfortable with this process. In some cases, women

would take the consent form home to their husbands for assurance and permission before signing. In other cases, husbands were present during interviews.

I was told later, once trust had been built, that some women were hesitant to sign the consent forms because of 'bad' experiences in the past with consultants who had spent a brief period of time interviewing women and then released reports where women felt that they had been misrepresented or their words had been taken out of context. As an aside, while employed by the University of New South Wales as a fieldwork tutor for anthropology students conducting fieldwork in Eu'a Island, Kingdom of Tonga, the family I stayed with had expressed similar negative experiences with consultants. The timing of my fieldwork also coincided with a study of domestic violence. In 2009, the report from the study was released. Women I spoke to were incredibly upset by the findings. Although they acknowledged that the information was important, they felt that domestic violence was an internal problem for I-Kiribati people and their Government and Churches to resolve and they were very upset that the rest of the world would think that Kiribati as a 'bad' place.

Once consent was granted, the interviews would commence. The majority of women, while fluent in English and declining a translator did not wish to be recorded as they were 'shy' in speaking English. In these instances, I took notes from the conversation which I then typed out and went through with them in a follow up meeting to ensure accuracy. Women participants reacted positively when I was able to give them a hardcopy of the notes that I had captured from our

conversations. The notes were then discussed and corrections made where needed. For participants who gave permission for the interview to be recorded, I would later provide them with a CD of the recording. The tangible evidence of their contribution to 'women's work' either recorded on paper or on a CD seemed to please participants. Two participants agreed to a translator. In both instances, the participants spoke in English directly to me as the researcher by the end of the interview.

In total I spoke to 42 participants (interviews and noted informal conversations). Much of this data is now out of scope as my research project narrowed and was refined to the period of decolonisation (originally my research scope included developments from 1945 to the 2000s). As a result, nine interviews are most relevant to an analysis of women's roles in the period examined. However all interviews enabled me to gain a greater understanding of women and their experiences. Of the nine most pertinent interviews, all were female over the age of 50. Four never married (two were nuns, one was a pastor, one chose not to marry); five were married (one was married to an *i-matang*, one to a doctor, one to a diplomat). The duration of interviews ranged from 40 minutes to three hours in one sitting. For participants who were heavily involved in women's clubs (particularly former community workers), interviews were conducted over a period of days, weeks and even years. In most cases I met participants between three and five times a week over six weeks. These meetings were informal and normally involved cups of tea, biscuits and coconuts.

The meetings took place at the home of participants, the headquarters of women's organisations or participant's offices. The nine key interview participants were identified via personal correspondence with Ms Dianne Goodwillie and Ms Ruth Lechte. Ms Lechte was involved in the Pacific women's movement during the 1970s, and Ms Goodwillie was active in women's development in Kiribati in the 1980s. The remaining interview participants were identified through a snowball effect whereby participants would recommend others. I maintained (and continue to maintain) contact with some of the participants via email and social media over the duration of the research project.

Gaps and limitations

As I was an unmarried *i-matang,* in her 20s and with no children, older female participants were at times hesitant to share certain experiences with me. My age and *i-matang* status meant that I had limited access to certain knowledge. Once it was revealed, through the sharing of life stories, that I had a 'customary' marriage (in that I lived with my partner) I was privy to more intimate knowledge of women's lives. Much of this knowledge is outside the scope of my research project and involved discussions about sex, alcohol abuse and domestic violence, which, in any case, were not within the terms of my ethical clearance. On reflection, it was not the content but rather the act of trust that was significant in these moments. As an *i-matang*, I acknowledge that there are, and will continue to be, aspects of I-Kiribati

custom and culture that, while I may be able to appreciate, will never fully understand.

As an *i-matang* who was engaged in a study intended to give primacy to women's experiences, some participants (particularly men), viewed me as a 'women's libber'/ feminist. As I did not refute this label, the perception of me as a feminist caused tension in the interview process for some participants. While this could not be fully resolved, I was able to mitigate it somewhat by my process of providing the participant with either a CD or notes from our interview. In the majority of cases, the participant seemed more at ease once the intentions of my research and outcomes of the interview had been more fully disclosed.

While I undertook language lessons in Kiribati, I was never fluent. As such, when requesting interviews, the presence of a translator was offered. As Kiribati was formerly under British Colonial administration, the archival materials from 1945 to 1979 (the scope of this research project) were largely recorded in English. Where certain reports were in Kiribati, typically an English translation was attached to the original file. In terms of my archival research, there were significant gaps in the archival record as a result of documents being burnt, misplaced or kept on private premises. For archives stored independently of the Kiribati National Library and Archives or OLSH Archives, I encountered some documents that had been adversely affected by improper storage (issue of rats as well as mould). I was also never allowed access to the South Tarawa *Irekenrao* archives, which I was told, stored

many of the archives relating to the formative years of the National Council of Women and AMAK (not held in the Kiribati National Archives).

Furthermore, the Kiribati Protestant Church refused to allow the Government to store Church archives at the National Archives. As a result records have been misplaced. Records and correspondence of the RAK organisation were the responsibility of the secretary. However once new secretaries were elected, the records were not transferred. Consequently records remained with individuals. During interviews, I was only able to access the personal records from one participant. Records have either been misplaced, former leaders have since passed or individuals were reluctant to share records due to personal information. As a result of these significant gaps, the original research scope of this thesis was restricted to developments prior to 1979. The archival evidence presented in Chapter 7 is also limited as a result of missing archives and my inability to access archives.

Due to the difficulties of travel between Outer Islands as well as time and funding available for fieldwork, this thesis is limited to the experience of the women's interests movement as it impacted Gilbertese women. As a result of the isolation of Outer Islands in conjunction with the available archival materials, this thesis presents a history of the period which has a predominant focus of an urban, educated woman's experiences. An analysis of newspaper articles that reveal the community development initiatives of women's clubs at village level is offered in Chapter 5 as a means of being inclusive of the experiences of Outer Island women.

However, I acknowledge that, due to the gaps and limitations outlined, this thesis fails to provide a full account of women's contribution during the decolonisation period. Rather this thesis positions women (albeit predominantly urban, educated women) as active agents of change in the histories of decolonisation of Kiribati. The roles of Tuvaluans (Ellice Islanders) and Banabans, while significant in this period, are unfortunately outside the scope of this thesis.

Chapter 4

The role of border-dweller women in the establishment of the women's interests program

In the late 1950s, humanitarian and feminist developments within the South Pacific Commission (SPC) called for women's interests to be recognised on the regional Pacific agenda. The British Colonial administration, a founding member of the SPC, took active steps to adopt this approach and apply it to the informal education of women in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. Colonial policy acknowledged that Pacific women were to have a legitimate role in the new independent nation, albeit in the domestic sphere, and active strategies aimed at building the capacity of organisational structures, personnel, training, networks and communication for women's betterment were implemented. These steps played out in the late 1950s and 1960s over four key levels – regional, colonial, island and village. Imitating programs elsewhere in the colonial world, a welfare approach towards women's development was adopted by the SPC and funded through external (initially American-based) Church groups. This approach trickled down through the British Colonial administration, particularly under the leadership of Resident Commissioner V J Andersen, and subsequent policies towards women's interests were driven and coordinated by the SPC. This chapter covers the period from the early 1950s to the mid-1960s against the backdrop of decolonisation and the execution of the Colonial administration's strategy for women's development. It outlines the early women's interests programs instigated in the 1950s under the leadership of western Colonial

appointees, which set the stage for the involvement of three overlapping waves of Gilbertese women as leaders of the movement from 1961 onwards. A detailed exploration of the waves and their successive roles in the indigenisation of women's interests is presented over the remaining chapters.

The first wave to agitate for women's interests was led by women who I will refer to as intercultural 'border-dwellers' supported by expatriate women in the Colony. A border-dweller can be characterised as a person who, largely due to their level of education or experiences abroad, is considered to be an educated elite and therefore on the periphery of the Indigenous society from which they claim cultural heritage. The term is perhaps best described by Vilsoni Hereniko in his equivalent concept of a 'coconut' cultural identity. Hereniko asserted '(m)igrants who return to the islands only to behave in a European fashion are labelled "coconuts" by their compatriots – like coconuts, they are brown outside but white inside'.[154] The terms insider/outsider or 'educated elite' are also used quite often interchangeably with this border-dweller/ 'coconut' cultural identity. This was a common trend in the Pacific during the 1960s whereby the process of decolonisation was seen as 'a clearly identifiable process of transforming legal and constitutional power from Colonial elites to the elites of newly formed sovereign states'.[155]

---

[154] Hereniko, V. (1999). Representations of cultural identities. In V. Hereniko & R. Wilson (Eds.), *Inside out: Literature, cultural politics, and identity in the New Pacific* (pp .137-165). Lanham, MD Rowman and Littlefield, p. 137

[155] Firth, (2000), op. cit., p. 314

In the context of women's interests in the GEIC, the first wave is characterised by the leadership of individual champions, who despite their peripheral status, remained respected within the community and became a collective voice for women. In the first wave, Colonial administrators deliberately appropriated intercultural border-dweller women and sponsored them as agents of change. By the time of the second wave, the leadership of the women's interests movement had shifted slightly to the newly emerging cohort of Indigenous female graduates of the SPC sponsored Community Education and Training Centre (CETC), Fiji. These women had largely been educated by their respective Churches following the introduction of education for girls, firstly by the missions as early as 1913 for the Protestant Church, and 1955 for the Catholic Church. It was not until 1959 that the Colonial administration established the first secular school for girls. During the third wave, women in leadership positions associated with Church affiliations came to prominence as leaders of change within their local communities. These women ultimately achieved the original objectives of the SPC, albeit through the safe haven and legitimacy of the Church, rather than through the government-sponsored Homemakers' Clubs as intended.

Over the remaining chapters, the evolution of women's interests in Kiribati, from its beginnings as an idea instigated by the SPC and implemented by the British Colonial administration, to become a formalised Gilbertese women's movement based on Church membership, will be traced through the activities of these successive waves of women change agents. In the Pacific region, no colonial power (Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, France, America or Britain), nor the European missions,

had a formalised women's interests program until regional initiatives were instigated by the SPC in the late 1950s. The policies of the SPC were therefore pivotal to the introduction of early women's interests programs established by the Colonial administrations.

By 1968, six years after the first Pacific nation regained its independence (Western Samoa in 1962), an initiative in the Colony to develop a women's interests program had been implemented by the Colonial administration. Less than a decade after the first government school for girls had opened, women's clubs had become a common and respected feature of local village Gilbertese and Ellice Islander society. A Report to the Resident Commissioner in 1968 observed, 'Women have shown themselves in other cultures as potent factors in social change'.[156] Colonial policy towards girls and women changed remarkably in the space of two decades. In 1948, the Colony had explicitly stated that there was no reason to educate Gilbertese women and girls, and that educated woman would become problematic for the Colony in the long term. Recovering from the horrific aftermath of the Second World War, the Colonial administration had reservations about educating woman as there were limited opportunities for educated men, let alone women, within the Colony.

However, by 1962 there was a marked shift in Colonial policy towards education as well as on the role of women and girls within the Colony, as highlighted in the 1968

156 McCreary & Boardman, (1968), op. cit., p. 40

Report. This shift was largely due to three factors; the long term impact of the Second World War, the growing influence of the SPC's regional agenda for women and the change of Resident Commissioner. (These factors formed the historical context of the development of women's interests in the Gilbert Islands and will be discussed further in this Chapter.) Education was promoted and the Colonial administration took active steps to identify and encourage foreign-educated I-Kiribati women (border-dwellers) to take on leadership positions in progressing the Colony's women's interests agenda. By 1968, this approach of sponsoring educated border-dwellers as the inaugural leaders of women's betterment was called into question. A 1968 Report to the Commissioner noted, 'the educated are the products of social change and are themselves agents of change' and that:

> Perhaps the most serious and immediate problem is the place or rather the lack of place, of the educated elite in the indigenous social structure. Their effectiveness as change agents is probably reduced by what appears to us as their peripheral place in indigenous life.[157]

Contrary to this view, this thesis will show that it was precisely the legitimacy afforded to border-dwellers because of their intercultural status, that their actions in challenging tradition could be accepted. While the 1968 Report provided valuable insights into women's activities during the period, it failed to link the two key observations – how the educated border-dwellers effectively promoted social change through women's clubs, and in doing so, how they challenged customary restrictions on women.

---

[157] McCreary & Boardman, (1968), op. cit., pp. 17-18

Two key figures in the first wave of the development of women's interests were Nei Katherine Tekanene and Mrs Tekarei Russell. Katherine Tekanene's story is presented as the principal exemplar of the first wave in the present Chapter while Tekarei Russell's story is most revealing in relation to the growing indigenisation of women's interests evident in the third wave. Through Katherine's story, this Chapter provides an understanding of the cultural elements that needed to be negotiated to effect the overall transition that occurred around decolonisation from a traditional women's culture to a self-determined Gilbertese approach to women's development. The overall tenet of the Chapter is that border-dwellers played a crucial role in the early stages of negotiating Colonial policy for women's betterment within island and village (local) politics.

Traditional gender roles

Traditionally, men and women had very distinct social and political roles within the village setting. These roles were seen to complement each other and were centred on the harsh environment of the atolls. In the context of the early 1960s, men were considered the head of the family and were responsible for cutting toddy, cultivating *babai*, fishing, canoe-making, building construction and other activities requiring physical strength. Women were the primary care-givers responsible for raising children and running the general household.[158]

[158] Talu, Alaima, (1992), op. cit., 177-84

I-Kiribati poetry provides a useful lens for understanding how women viewed gender roles. The four poems selected below offer insight into gender roles in Kiribati. The female poets depict women as mothers and wives and do so in a positive and affirmative way. The poem, 'My Wish' by Tereeao Teingiia, reflects on the sacred role of mothers in preparing children for adulthood:

> When I was little,
> I followed my mother's instructions
> I flew beside her or behind
> I was taught not to do this and that
> I began to be aware of good and bad things
> I could tell which were the tastiest nectars
> I began to know the good time to harvest
> I wished I was big….
>
> Now, I am mature,
> I can fly alone
> With my mother's instincts
> Thinking wisely
> Over the beautiful views
> Onto the sweet nectar
> I wish my dreams come true.[159]

In addition to child-rearing and domestic duties, women collected shellfish, made the string for the *maneaba* and other buildings and wove mats and other handicrafts.[160] Karibannang Binokatau's poem about '*Te Bwere'*, a tool used in the making of pandanus mats, recollects the traditional skill of weaving. The *te bwere* symbolises the bestowing of traditional skills from mother to daughter and presents this rite of passage as an intrinsic and revered part of I-Kiribati identify:

---

[159] Tereeao Teingiia, (2003), 'My Wish' In Teingiia, T., Rokete, T., & Crowl, L., *Mana: Kiribati Special: A South Pacific Journal of Art and Culture, Language and Literature,* 13(2). Suva, Fiji: South Pacific Creative Arts Society and Mana Publications. p 37

[160] Talu, Alaima, (1992), op. cit., 177-84

My most precious gift
That I've kept
Since a little girl.
Was sharp shining teeth
Pinned on the edge of copper
To swirl smooth pandanus leaves
A present from my mother
Evoking visions of my foremothers
Te bwere, captures the heart
Of my people.[161]

Her poem highlights the significance of tradition, respect for ancestors and the sharing of knowledge within a family.

Image 6: I-Kiribati dancer in traditional costume performing at the International Women's Day celebrations 2008

[161] Karibannang Binokatau, (2003), 'Te Bwere', In Teingiia, T., Rokete, T., & Crowl, L., *Mana: Kiribati Special: A South Pacific Journal of Art and Culture, Language and Literature,* 13(2). Suva, Fiji: South Pacific Creative Arts Society and Mana Publications. p 28

The complementarity of gender roles is portrayed in 'Kiribati Beckons' by Katarina Everi:

> My ancestors' land from long ago
> Where trees grow slender against the ocean
> And fishes swim with its currents
>
> My father and my mother's land
> Where birds fly across the water
> Building their nests in trees
>
> The sun dries our coconuts
> Men catch many fishes
> Women salt them for sale
>
> Men wake early to cut toddy
> Women boil it for *kamaimai*
> Men till soil in *babai* pits
>
> *Unimane* sit in the *maneaba*
> Making final decisions for our villagers
> While women weave sleeping mats
>
> A land of wisdom
> Of love shared among generations
> Where I was born
>
> Its crowning wisdom of
> Health, peace and prosperity
> Beckons us to return.[162]

Katarina Everi's poem summons imagery of outer atoll life. Due to the harsh environment of Kiribati and its lack of resources, Everi's poem weaves key aspects of Kiribati life by juxtaposing how men and women work together in their restricted environment.

[162] Everi, K. (2003). Kiribati beckons. In Teingiia, Tereeao, Rokete, Teewata, Crowl, Linda, South Pacific Creative Arts Society. *Mana: Kiribati Special: A South Pacific Journal of Art and Culture, Language and Literature*. *13*(2). p 11

This sentiment of men and women working together extended to analogies of national identity. In village politics, the husband sat in the *maneaba* and spoke on behalf of his family. The woman sat behind her husband (or father or brother) and was not allowed to speak publicly. The *unimane* made the decisions on behalf of the whole village and the women and young men were to carry them out.[163] Women had little power in decisions outside her home. While the *maneaba* system is consistently portrayed in the literature as a male domain, in her poem 'Ode to a Mwaneaba', Tereeao Teingiia presents both a feminine and masculine identity in her description of the *maneaba*, which is both a physical place and traditional political system:

> Motherly, arms akimbo
> Spreading to enfold us
> We, the Nareau[164] nation
>
> Never rude, seated
> Embracing reassured oratory
> We are Nareau's children
>
> Wise old men's ethos laid
> Unique foundations
> For younger generations
>
> Come, share our ancestors' banquet
> Drink the sweat of our forefathers
> Preserving I-Tungaru[165] hearts
> We, the Nareau people.[166]

[163] Talu, (1992), op. cit., p 178
[164] Nareau is the creator of Kiribati
[165] Refers to I-Kiribati people
[166] Tereeao Teingiia, (2003), 'Ode to a Mwaneaba', In Teingiia, Tereeao, Rokete, Teewata, Crowl, Linda, South Pacific Creative Arts Society. *Mana: Kiribati Special: A South Pacific Journal of Art and Culture, Language and Literature*. *13*(2). p 34

Image 7: A village *maneaba* in North Tarawa, made with traditional materials

Image 8: The Catholic *maneaba* in permanent materials at Teaoraereke, South Tarawa, during International Women's Day celebrations, March 2008

A Western (*i-matang*) reader may interpret gender roles in Kiribati as oppressive, as Roddy Cordon reflected in her memoirs - '[a] wife ranked somewhere below his (her husband's) canoe, his house and his children in the opinion of many a man'.[167] However, the poems of Teingiia, Binokatau and Everi s summon sentimental memories of nostalgia for the 'wisdom' of Kiribati and describe the division of labour and decision-making, not as a form of oppression against women, but as a balanced dichotomy of the genders working together with their environment with the end result of *te mauri, te raoi, ao te tabomoa* (health, peace and prosperity).

Interviews revealed that many women also view their positions in relation to men in similar ways. However, this is perhaps a romanticised perspective. The reality for the majority of Gilbertese women was that of restricted movement and total supervision by their father or husband or husband's family. Women had to gain permission from the male head of her family on who she may speak and visit. A girl's virginity was strictly guarded as it was important a girl remain a virgin until she was married.[168] Village life was harsh and demanding. Having large families was a burden.

[167] Cordon, (1996), op. cit., p 5
[168] Talu, Alaima, (1992), op. cit., pp 177-84

The British Administration's experience of decolonisation

The Second World War was a turning point for the Gilbertese and Ellice Islanders and their relationship with the Colonial administration for two key reasons. Firstly, the post war international political environment shifted from an emphasis on empire to decolonisation. Secondly, the Battle of Tarawa and influence of American troops impacted the way in which the Gilbertese and Ellice Islanders viewed the British administration. While the 'dilemmas of decolonisation'[169] were experienced by the British Empire as early as the 1930s, the Second World War accelerated the process in some Pacific colonies. Prior to the War, the British Empire was committed to the decolonisation of India but remained 'vague as to whether this would apply to other dependencies… the smallness of the Caribbean and Pacific dependencies seemed to preclude independence' at this time.[170] In the small dependencies, decolonisation was treated as a 'slow, evolving process'.[171]

The Second World War triggered a new sense of urgency in this process and led to political reforms and calls for self-government and recognition within British administration. The emergence of the United States of America as a strong critic against colonialism, as well as anti-colonial movements and protests in the late 1940s and early 1950s in Africa, helped to carry the momentum of this sense of urgency and remove any possibility of retaining the Empire. For Britain, this move away from Empire led to policies which encouraged a transition to the creation of a

169 Macdonald, (1997), op. cit.
170 ibid.
171 ibid.

Commonwealth under the monarchy. This meant internal self-government for colonies while Britain retained control of international affairs and foreign policy. As Macdonald argued, the notion at this time was that 'true' political independence was only meaningful alongside economic independence. This led to the British administration to implement 'programs of economic investment, the provision of infrastructure and social development under technical co-operation, Colonial development and welfare projects and similar schemes'.[172] These initiatives fell under the British administration's overarching agenda of 'good governance' whereby the importance of sound economic management and the development of civil society were prioritised. Furthermore, this agenda was underpinned by the principles of democracy, human rights, and the implementation of an independent judicial system, competent public sector management, a market-friendly economy and robust institutions of civil society.[173]

Regionally, the British administration's approach to decolonisation in their Pacific colonies was largely embedded within the agenda of the SPC. Established in 1947, the role of the SPC was initially to respond to the basic needs of the island territories in the aftermath of the Second World War. As a founding member of the SPC, the British administration played a pivotal role in shaping the direction in which the development process would take in the region. However, in the case of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, the implementation of this process was largely left to the individual agenda of the Resident Commissioner. Despite this, the SPC

172 ibid., p 6
173 ibid., p 3

played a significant role in facilitating higher education and technical training to ease the transition from Colony to self-government. Particularly for women, the establishment of the Community Education and Training Centre (CETC) was significant in this space and became a training school specifically funded by the SPC, targeting community education for women at the village level. The CETC adopted a welfare approach to address basic human rights and key issues of high infant mortality rates and low life expectancies. To achieve this, women were included in community education strategies, which were largely based on training in home economics – namely, child and maternal health, nutrition, sewing and cooking. This approach was underpinned by Christian values and intentions of creating 'good mothers and wives'. By 1957, and in line with internationally agreed and accepted good governance practices to be included in decolonisation processes, the SPC undertook an approach to strengthen existing civil society institutions, significantly religious groups that targeted minorities.

The GIEC experience of decolonisation

The Gilbert Islands had become a British protectorate in 1892. In 1916, the Ellice Islands Protectorate and Banaba were joined with the Gilbert Islands group and became known as the Gilbert and Ellice Island Colony. Prior to the Second World War, the Colonial headquarters was based on Ocean Island (now Banaba), which was where the British Phosphate Company (BPC) was headquartered. Despite clear cultural and linguistic differences (and tensions) between the Gilbertese, Banabans

and Ellice Islanders, Britain continued to manage the three groups under the one Colonial administration, which also included Tokelau (until 1926), the Line and Phoenix Islands. French, American, British and to a lesser extent, Samoan missionaries had been relatively active (with varied successes) in the Colony and at the outbreak of the Second World War, there was also a small New Zealand and Australian presence. During the War, the Japanese invaded the Gilbert Islands. The invasion led to horrific deaths of Gilbertese as well as expatriates, mistreatment of islanders and, significantly in South Tarawa, severe damage to infrastructure. The arrival of American troops, who pushed out the Japanese in the Battle of Tarawa, instigated a shift in the way the locals viewed their Colonial masters.[174] The British were no longer seen as a 'protector' as they had been against the corruption and exploitation of the whalers, traders and blackbirders towards the locals in the nineteenth century. Rather, the Gilbertese recognised the emerging power of the Americans and pleaded to the United States (US) to stay and take over the administration of the Colony. Macdonald asserted:

> the American military presence dominated lifestyles, offered new opportunities to make money, to travel, and led to a re-ordering of Islander's perceptions of the world and of their own place in it. Beside the self-confident might of the American presence, British officialdom faded into insignificance and, for some, Uncle Sam became the new Messiah.[175]

Adhering to the Truman Doctrine and critical of the concept of Empire (despite their interests in Hawai'i, American Samoa and increasing presence in Micronesia), the USA declined and administration of the Colony fell back in the hands of Britain.

---

[174] Macdonald, (1982), op. cit., p 143
[175] ibid.

A new sense of urgency internationally did not, however, lead to efforts by the British administration in the 1950s to move forward with the decolonisation process in the GEIC. Macdonald argued:

> there was no sense of urgency, nor indeed any real interest discernible in Colonial Office attitudes towards the Pacific in the 1950s. Rather, there was a negative, cost-cutting approach towards development and welfare schemes, and a cautious, conservative response on other matters. There was little in the way of leadership, or of initiatives towards decolonisation, or of the type of development that might give an economic underpinning to statehood for small dependencies.[176]

In terms of development for women, this was evident in the delays to establish the first government school for girls. The British administration's hesitancy and reluctance to fund the Elaine Bernacchi School (EBS) (identified as a high priority in 1945 but not funded until 1959) was a part of:

> a wider campaign to restrict the Colony's recurrent commitments to the level of income in a future without phosphate. Economic planning was also influenced by the knowledge that the copra contract with the United Kingdom would expire in 1957, and the expectation that copra revenue would be sharply reduced once the Colony had to sell on the open market. Thus basic capital developments – the administrative headquarters, the hospital, the high schools, and Betio harbour – caused few problems because they could be financed from Colonial Development and Welfare grants but projects for the Outer Islands, for example, were held back from the development programme for 1955-1960.[177]

Furthermore, the program prioritised the 'improvement of social services and increasing efficiency and economy of the administration rather than economic development'. [178] Noting the severe damage to infrastructure after the Second World War, particularly on South Tarawa where the Colonial headquarters was

[176] ibid., p 174
[177] ibid., p 171
[178] cited in ibid.

relocated from Ocean Island, and the financial restraints on the Colony, it is perhaps no surprise that development initiatives were limited. Furthermore, the remoteness of the GEIC from sea and aircraft routes, as well as markets limited growth. However, the isolation of the Colony also enabled the individual agenda of the Resident Commissioner to dictate policy. Michael Bernacchi, the Resident Commissioner from 1952 to 1962, implemented an economic and social policy that focused on centralised government instead of facilities that required high recurrent costs such as educational and medical services.[179] The decade of Bernacchi's Resident Commissionership:

> had as its other major achievement the completion of post-war reconstruction and the establishment of some new services – most notably seen in boys and girls high schools, a teachers' training college, a new hospital, a small-ship harbour at Betio, and an administration centre.[180]

Bernacchi focused on centralised government in South Tarawa to the detriment of the Outer Islands. The high cost of inter-atoll communication and travel further contributed to the concentration of facilities in South Tarawa. There was a growing gap in terms of an urban/rural divide between South Tarawa - the centre of government - and the Outer Islands. Bernacchi's policy was one of restricted movement and he discouraged urbanisation.[181]

The next major shift in economic and social policy was not instigated by London, but rather from the incoming Resident Commissioner V. J. Andersen who took over the Commissionership in April 1962. Andersen had previous experience working in

179 ibid.
180 ibid., p 173
181 ibid.

the Solomon Islands. He pursued a shift in policy towards a focus on identifying what the Colony required and searched for funds to achieve it, rather than planning according to limited available funds.[182] While still dependent on the phosphate industry, Andersen pursued a policy of expanding the available revenue source base. Significantly for women's clubs, this included handicraft sales. In terms of women's interests, he was also an advocate for initiating family planning community education.[183]

Andersen also recognised the need for the Colonial administration to work with the Churches in development plans. This perhaps reflects his experiences gained while working in the Solomon Islands. In describing the relationship of the missions and the Colonial government in the Solomon Islands in the 1930s, Judith Bennet wrote:

> Government and missions in the Solomons were allies in wider questions, but it was an uneasy alliance because missions, with their spiritual dimensions and universal aspect, always had far more potential to provide a new unity: such a unity among its subjects was something a numerically weak and financially strained Solomons administration feared'.[184]

Andersen's approach to be inclusive of the two predominant Churches, the Catholic and Protestant, in development initiatives is reflective of the British administration's policies in the Solomons.

Andersen also stressed the importance of education (advocating a return to the policy of 'education for change') and pressed for English as the *lingua franca* in the

---

[182] ibid., p 174
[183] ibid.
[184] Bennet, J. (1994), Holland, Britain, and Germany in Melanesia, In Howe, K., Kiste, R., & Lal, B. V. (Eds.), *Tides of history: The Pacific Islands in the twentieth century*. (pp. 40-70) Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, p 61

civil service. To improve the quality of education, a policy of recruiting expatriates to the Colony, such as Mrs Roddy Cordon, was pursued. From 1962 to 1967, 'the policies followed …saw a heavy concentration upon social services centred on South Tarawa. Inevitably, these policies …caused an increase in the number of Europeans in the civil service'.[185] The number of expatriates doubled between 1964 and 1970 as 'more expatriates were hired to train Islanders to take over positions held by Europeans'.[186] This impacted the role of 'border-dwellers' in this space as these European women worked closely with them. It was also during Andersen's Resident Commissionership that calls for responsible government were initiated. While these initiatives towards self-government were targeted at men, women were also seen to have a legitimate role in the development process. This role was largely influenced by regional developments instigated by the SPC.

Women's role in the decolonisation process – a regional experience

The South Pacific Commission (SPC) was established in 1947 in response to the devastation of the Second World War and power realignments in the Asia-Pacific, as well as in Europe.[187] The original Commission included the six colonial governments present in the Pacific region after the War. These governments were Australia, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the

185 Macdonald, (1982), op. cit., p 177
186 ibid.
187 Herr, R. A., (1994), Regionalism and nationalism In Howe, K., Kiste, R., & Lal, B. V. (Eds.), *Tides of history: The Pacific Islands in the twentieth century*. (pp 283-299) Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, p 285

United States of America. After regaining independence, Western Samoa became a member in 1964. The role of the SPC was to provide basic human rights as well as consultation and advice to the Colonial administrations 'on ways of improving the well-being of the people of the Pacific island territories'.[188] During the late 1950s and 1960s, this process of consultation and advice was organised within the SPC work program as sub-programs under the fields of Health, Economic Development and Social Development. Women's interests typically fell under the umbrella program of Social Development, more specifically under the Community Education Program but also tied in closely with Health, particularly within the Diet and Nutrition as well as Maternal and Child Health (MCH) programs.

In 1956, the SPC began discussions on the development of women in the Pacific region through the establishment of a Clearing-House on Women's Interests. This Clearing-House recognised the potential of women's organisations to facilitate localised development initiatives and proposed ideas as to how best to utilise these existing social structures for the betterment of women. The 1956 SPC Annual Report announced that:

> [e]nquires have been made in the islands to decide what features of the proposed service would be most helpful to the various women's organisations, and to build up a collection of working material on women's clubs and services in the Pacific and comparable areas.[189]

The following year, women's interests had been firmly established under the work program. Initial work in the area of women's interests began with an 'exploration

188 South Pacific Commission. (1960). *Progress in the Pacific: Report of the South Pacific Commission for the year 1959.* Noumea, New Caledonia., p. 2

of expressed needs for assistance'.[190] In 1957, the SPC and the United Church Women of the United States of America were in consultation 'for the purpose of achieving a mutually satisfactory working agreement'.[191] While Western and Christian principles were being embedded in the women's interests program, provisions were also being made to encourage an exchange of ideas between Pacific women at a regional level. In 1957, the Commission 'made moderate provision to assist either inter-island travel or travel from the Pacific Islands to places outside the area, to enable representatives of women's organisations to learn more of each other's work'.[192] This led to the 1959 conference, which laid the foundations for a regional consciousness on women's interests and the authorisation of the appointment in 1959 of Miss Marjorie Stewart, Women's Interests Officer for the Pacific Region. This appointment was achieved through financial assistance from the United Church Women of America. Miss Stewart began work with women's groups 'for the purpose of encouraging mutual assistance to strengthen local programmes of community activities'.[193]

The position of a Women's Interests Officer was funded for a two year period by the United Church Women of the United States of America.[194] From the onset, regional women's development in the Pacific was supported and heavily influenced by Church affiliation. Miss Stewart's task was to co-ordinate women's interests and initiate programs that would improve the daily lives of Pacific women. One feature

---

[191] South Pacific Commission. (1958). *Progress in the Pacific: Report of the South Pacific Commission for the year 1957*. Noumea, New Caledonia. p 21
192ibid.
193ibid.
194ibid.

of her new role was to travel across the territories to assess the needs of the women and to initiate an overall plan for the region. This marked the first moves towards a regional agenda for Pacific women. It is from this early stage that women's interests in the Pacific became intrinsically linked with the Christian ideology and Western values on gender. To be a good Christian mother, a welfare approach to women's interests was adopted based on the vision of improving women's lives through training in domestic skills.

Initial developments towards women's interests were based on improving women's roles as mothers. A distinct part in improving a mother's role was to ensure good health of her family through nutrition. This agenda also hints at potential barriers as a result of custom which might impact on women's access to better information and education. In 1957, 'the study of the role and function of custom and beliefs in relation to infant and maternal welfare' was included on the agenda for the upcoming 1959 conference.[195] This inclusion highlights that the SPC acknowledged both the importance of maternal welfare and the intrinsic link between maternal welfare and custom. In 1959, the SPC explicitly included Maternal and Child Health (MCH) under its Health Program and appointed Miss Leonie Martin as Health Education Officer. Her role was to travel in the region within the jurisdiction of the SPC to promote health education through the training of local personnel for the Commission's nutrition program.[196] Health promotion was largely targeted at women's groups through community education. The importance of women as

195 ibid., p 8
196 South Pacific Commission. (1960). *Progress in the Pacific: Report of the South Pacific Commission for the year 1959.* Noumea, New Caledonia, pp 5-6

mothers in the regional women's interests agenda furthered the role of women as good Christian mothers and wives. [197]

By 1960, the health programs of nutrition, diet and maternal and child health care became fundamentally linked with women's interests and community education through home economics training. The SPC reported in 1960 that 'women's interests [is] to work together with a home economics officer to promote…the essentials of good nutrition… particularly to mothers during the weaning period'.[198] Collaboration between health education, women's interests and home economics was also supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) through the provision of an FAO home economics officer at this time.[199] The SPC planned to implement its programs (nutrition and diet, MCH and women's interests) through community education training by disseminating information through existing women's organisations.

The process of consultation had begun by requesting existing women's organisations to assess their current needs and culminated in 1961 when a Women's Interests Seminar was scheduled. The aim of the Seminar was 'to consolidate progress made in this field and to provide an opportunity for close consideration of means to further the work within the region'.[200] The Seminar

197 South Pacific Commission. (1961). *Progress in the Pacific: Report of the South Pacific Commission for the year 1960*. Noumea, New Caledonia, p 5
198ibid.
199ibid.
[200] South Pacific Commission, (1960), op. cit., p 16

became the first regional meeting of Pacific women and had a profound affect on the women of the Gilberts. The Seminar provided the impetus for the Colonial administration to involve Gilbertese women as leaders in their program for the development of women's interests. The first women selected to be involved were border-dwellers.

Implementing the Colonial women's interests program in the Gilbert Islands- the role of border-dwellers

The Gilbertese women selected were identified by the wives of prominent Colonial officials from within their own social networks and on the basis of their level of education and/or exposure to Western culture. It was thus no accident that the women selected to implement the government's women's interests program in the Colony were border-dweller Gilbertese women (although they were not referred to by those labels at the time). The first border-dweller to be recruited to the program was Nei Katherine Tekanene.

In the 1950s, the wives of expatriate Colonial officials had begun to play a role in advocating for women's development. Mrs Elaine Bernacchi, wife of the then Resident Commissioner, had developed a close friendship with Nei Katherine Tekanene, the wife of a Gilbertese doctor. Nei Katherine Tekanene's position as a woman in Kiribati at this time was unique. Born in Fiji to Gilbertese parents, Nei Katherine's grandfather was taken to Samoa from Kiribati to work on the plantations. From Samoa, her family migrated to Fiji, where Nei Katherine was

educated. As a result Nei Katherine spoke very little Kiribati but was fluent in both English and Fijian. In Fiji, Nei Katherine met her husband Ten Bewebwentekai Tekanene who was training to become a doctor. Ten Bewebwentekai was also Gilbertese and his family conservatively adhered to Gilbertese custom. Once married, Nei Katherine and Ten Bewebwentekai returned to Tarawa where Ten Bewebwentekai worked as a doctor at the local hospital. Nei Katherine was distinctly aware of her 'Gilbertese roots' and culture but had never been to the atolls before.[201] On her arrival in 1950, she described Tarawa as recovering from a devastating war and lacking the basic facilities she had become accustomed to in Fiji. Her fluency in the English language as well as her husband's respected position within the community (along with Katherine's tenacious personality) resulted in Nei Katherine forging a friendship with the then Resident Commissioner Bernacchi and his wife Mrs Elaine Bernacchi. When Mrs Bernacchi, through her husband's position, received correspondence from the SPC inquiring as to a suitable Gilbertese delegate for the upcoming 1961 Women's Interest Seminar in Apia, Samoa, she nominated Nei Katherine because of her natural charisma, outspoken personality and fluency in the English language along with her unique position of being Gilbertese but 'not really Gilbertese in [her] way of thinking'.[202] Nei Katherine's attendance marked the first time a Gilbertese woman travelled overseas for a conference.

---

201 Tekanene, K (personal communication, April 4, 2008).
202 ibid. Katherine Tekanene is a self-proclaimed border-dweller describing herself as 'enough Gilbertese but not quite enough'.

The Colony, like other British territories in the Pacific at this time, had to respond to Britain's decisions in 1960 to withdraw from the Pacific. After famously announcing in the Crown Colony of Fiji that they had ten years to prepare for independence, the 1970s became the decade of decolonisation. Fiji and Tonga regained independence in 1970, Tuvalu and the Solomon Islands in 1978, Kiribati in 1979 and finally, the last of the British Pacific territories, Vanuatu in 1980.[203] Women were seen as having a legitimate role in newly independent nations, albeit in the domestic sphere (predominantly in terms of maternal and child health care, nutrition, home economics). Regionally, local Pacific men were being educated to ensure the transition from colony to independence ran smoothly. These educated Gilbertese men came home and influenced their wives so that men and women were challenging Gilbertese custom from both inside and out. The women identified and selected by the Colonial administration were Gilbertese by birth right and had claims to Gilbertese heritage but had been educated abroad (typically in Fiji) and were bilingual. From their experiences and education abroad, they were witness to developments outside Kiribati and were able to be critical of the situation of Gilbertese women. These women typically were either married to an i-*matang* or a highly educated Gilbertese man. This enabled them greater freedom from customary restrictions.

While the label 'border-dweller' is not explicitly used in Kiribati (either in the past or present), this concept of cultural identity (also drawing from Vilsoni Hereniko's

---

[203] Macdonald, (1994), op. cit., p 173

concept of "coconut" cultural identity), assists in understanding how Gilbertese women viewed and categorised themselves. Gilbertese women themselves expressed this concept in terms of 'being Gilbertese but not a real Gilbertese' as Katherine said of herself '[I am] not really Gilbertese in my way of thinking, I do it the way I think I should do it'.[204] In the early stages of the implementation of a women's interests program, it was the border-dweller women who were to become active leaders and agents of change in the movement. This Chapter demonstrates how being 'Gilbertese but not a real Gilbertese woman', or in other words an educated woman on the periphery, became increasingly relevant to how women saw themselves. Others (significantly the Colonial administration and later grassroots women collectively) now saw women as being in a position to facilitate change.

Border-dwellers negotiating custom

Border-dwellers played a key role in negotiating custom. One early example of this was precipitated by Nei Katherine's nomination to attend the regional seminar in Samoa. While Nei Katherine was eager to attend and had the support of her husband, her husband's family was fiercely against it. It was seen as going against custom for a married Gilbertese woman to travel un-chaperoned. After much negotiation, a placement was found at the hospital for Dr Bewebwentekai so that

[204] Tekanene, K (personal communication, April 4, 2008).

he could accompany his wife to Samoa. Nei Katherine, while being raised by Gilbertese parents and being aware of Gilbertese custom, recalls this time with a level of disbelief that the situation was made into 'such a big deal'. As far as she was concerned, she had her husband's support and to her that was all that mattered. Fear that her husband's family were threatening a divorce if she travelled unchaperoned forced her to abide by custom and led her to negotiate an alternative compromise to suit all involved. In describing this period of her life, Katherine explains, 'the only thing that is cutting me down is the custom but because I love my husband I have to give way to get things done… [and to] keep the family in good harmony'.[205]

In numerous interviews, when discussing women who had been educated abroad (typically Fiji) or had married an *i-matang* (foreigner), these women were typically referred to casually as, 'being Gilbertese but not a real Gilbertese'. This explanation was used, in the majority of instances, when one woman was attempting to justify the culturally inappropriate actions of a border-dweller woman. These inappropriate actions largely involved challenging the patriarchal hierarchy and typically included such taboos as speaking in public, being dismissive of the *unimwane* or husband's family, or being seen as too 'political' or too vocal. Because they were 'not real Gilbertese', their actions against custom were accepted to a certain extent and this enabled these women to challenge the boundaries of custom and voice women's aspirations for change. A contemporary (and later a

[205] ibid.

leader of the Catholic women's movement) expressed this tolerance of Nei Katherine Tekanene's traditionally inappropriate behaviour and the positive way in which it was viewed by traditional women, in the following words:

> Katherine Tekanene was the first one (woman) to become a member of the House of Representatives. She was very vocal. At one meeting, we were sitting (and) my father was at that meeting too...we (the women) want to say something but we wait for our opportunity, (whereas) she (Katherine) was Fiji-born. So whatever she wants to say she just says. Some laugh, some are disappointed …I wasn't so confident, with the audience, (as they were) all older than me…but it's about time women are given the opportunity.[206]

In her memoirs, Mrs Cordon reflected on this period in the following passage:

> The Government had been anxious that she [Katherine] should attend the Community Conference in Apia in 1961, but as it was against custom for a married woman to travel without her husband, a medical job was discovered for Bewebwentekai in Apia at that time, and the two of them set off. There Katherine met Freda Gwilliam and Marjorie Stewart, and the three of them discussed the needs of the Colony women.[207]

The Colony's newspaper in 1975 reflected on Nei Tekanene's career:

> Mrs Tekanene in 1961 had the opportunity to represent the Colony at the first Women's Interests Seminar held in Apia, Western Samoa sponsored by the South Pacific Commission….[208]

Reporting on the Seminar, Katherine provided the following description:

> We took off from Nadi Airport at 12 noon on Friday 28th August to attend the Women's Interests Training Seminar at Apia, Western Samoa. We spent the night at Pago Pago in American Samoa where we were excellently cared for at the Rainmaker Hotel. We arrived [in] Apia [on] 28thAugust, 12.15p.m. and were met at the Airport by Dr. R. Seddon who was there to meet all the delegates and had cars waiting to take us to the Papauta Girls School which was kindly loaned to the Conference. That afternoon was spent meeting the other delegates and getting to know one another. Altogether there were 44 of us. We represented the 15 territories of the Pacific islands. The Formal Opening Ceremony was held at Papauta Girls School [at] 9am. [the] next day. Dr. R. Seddon opened the Conference. Also present were the High

---

[206] Baiteke, I. (personal communication, May 22, 2007).
207Cordon, (1996), op. cit., pp 43-4
[208] Awira, K. (1975, August). Women's page: A women's Interests Officer. *Atoll Pioneer,* p *6*.

> Commissioner of Western Samoa Mr. Wright, and the three High Chiefs of Samoa, Mataafa, Malietoa and Tamasese Tamasese with their wives and many other leaders from various organisations.[209]

To gain insight into the motivations for the SPC to nominate Western Samoa to host this SPC sponsored event, it is noteworthy to juxtapose Western Samoa with other Pacific colonies at this time. Western Samoa was the first Pacific Colony to regain independence in 1962; just months after the Women's Interests' Training Seminar took place. In the period of decolonisation, one could rightly infer that the SPC would be suggesting Samoa, and in this case, the organisation of Samoan women into committees, as a model to be adopted by the rest of the Pacific region.

Enclosed in Katherine's report was an outline of the program. Lecture topics included 'Women Around the World' presented by UNESCO and SPC, 'South Pacific Background' presented by SPC, viewing of a South Pacific film (SPC), 'The Women's Club', presented by SPC, 'Planning Community Education Programmes' presented by UNESCO which included a group study of 'techniques, etc., for planning and conducting selected programmes' presented by FAO, London Missionary Society (LMS) Group', 'Handicraft' (SPC), 'Training facilities and Programme and Personnel resources (SPC), 'The Associated Country Women of the World' (Mrs Schroder), 'Thrift and the 'Co-operative Movement in the Pacific', as well as a visit to the Nafuna Agricultural Research Station and 'Inspection Day with District Nurses

[209] Tekanene, K. (1961). Women's interests training seminar held at Apia, Western Samoa 29th August – 21st September 1961. Report by Nei Katherine Tekanene, Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, p 1

Vaimauga District' followed by a lunch with the village Women's Committee, and a meeting with Women's Committees at Vailama'.[210]

The program centred on workshops canvassing family life and homemaking, preparation and use of teaching aides, means of communication, health and hygiene, leadership training, work with youth, as well as food and nutrition. The program also included handicraft, recreation, films on community education (produced by the SPC), committee discussions, shopping and posting, a visit to Afega Village, demonstrations by the Girl Guides, a Samoan cultural evening, a visit to Togafu'afu'a, an official cocktail party and closing ceremony. The Seminar ran for a total of four weeks. As Katherine described in her report:

> From the above programme you can see that we were kept very busy with lectures, meeting with the various Women's Committees at their villages, watching the District Nurses at work and also visiting the Nafuna Agricultural Research Station. During the discussion we were each asked questions concerning the customs and ways of life in our individual island groups. We each found the different delegate's descriptions added another facet to the complete picture.[211]

Katherine's report detailed her visit to local Samoan villages. She stated:

> Altogether we visited 3 villages of different districts and I must say that I enjoyed these visits very much as the Women's Committee in these places see that the village and the homes and their surroundings are kept clean and tidy, they help the district nurses with their work in childcare and mothercraft, and also supervise cooking, sewing and handicraft lessons each week.[212]

In her report, Katherine provides suggestions and recommendations as to how the establishment of a women's committee could function in the Gilbert Islands, 'If our

[210] ibid., pp 1-2
[211] ibid.
[212] ibid., p 4

Women's Committee is well established in Tarawa and other places, the above could be that to our women and I'm sure that they could do just as well as the Samoan women'.[213]

Under the heading 'What a Women's Interests Officer Does' Katherine describes the role of Miss Marjorie Stewart as being responsible for the organisation of women's clubs or groups in the promotion of 'the interests of women in conjunction with existing village communities' and 'furthering the process of adult education towards family and community betterment'. The latter is achieved by 'teaching and spreading better methods of cooking and housekeeping'; 'infant and child care'; 'ante-natal care', 'sewing and traditional arts and crafts' and 'general adult education with particular reference to home economy and improvement'.[214] In this role the Women's Interests Officer must be responsible for 'training selected women as club or groups leaders' while preparing and distributing 'information and material for leaders to use in their groups'.[215] In her report, Katherine suggested to the British Colonial administration:

> that the Women's Interest's Officer should visit the Colony and give expert advice on the cost to the Colony of a Women's Interests Officer. If a senior officer's wife could be found who would undertake the work the cost need not be high, particularly if the project is started on Tarawa and Ocean Island where there is a changing population it might be possible to spread the idea to the other islands at little cost.[216]

The report went on to describe the logistical time frame if a women's interests program was to be established in the Gilbert Islands:

---

[213] ibid.
[214] ibid.
[215] ibid.
[216] ibid., pp 4-5

> If as suggested, the project is started on Tarawa and Ocean Islands, and the ideas can be spread to other islands from there, it would be necessary to visit newly formed clubs or groups as often as shipping allowed. I think that to start the project on Tarawa will take a very considerable time to be established, in particular among Gilbertese women, and two or three years work will probably be required.[217]

On Katherine Tekanene's return from the Women's Interest Seminar held in Samoa, in a report to the colonial administration she put forth her recommendations as to how the Colony should proceed with a program to implement the SPC's women's interests agenda within the local context of the Gilbert Islands. The changing demographics and recent urbanisation of Tarawa were acknowledged in her report and as such, the new urban centre of South Tarawa was chosen as the pilot site for implementation. Importantly, her report recognised the prominence of the role of two key Churches -the Protestant and Catholic.

In her planning, Katherine provided a suggested overview of communications necessary for the project to be implemented successfully by recommending 'continual personal contact' and 'later by touring as shipping permits and by the distribution of a three monthly newsletter'.[218] These recommendations no doubt were influenced by ideas suggested at the Women's Interest Seminar and Katherine was encouraged to apply and modify these ideas to suit the Kiribati context.

On her return, Katherine attempted to establish a women's club by introducing the ideas she had learnt from the Seminar and applying these to the informal and pre-

[217] ibid., p 5
[218] Ibid., pp 4-5

existing women's health committees, 'It was after this Seminar that the first Women's Club was formed at Bikenibeu involving mostly Medical staff's wives'. [219] However, as Resident Commissioner Andersen reported in a letter to Miss Stewart, the SPC Women's Interests Officer for the Pacific Region, Nei Katherine Tekanene's attempts were wrought with suspicion from the *uniaine* who were reluctant to give up the modest power base they had secured within the committee.[220]

Despite this, on return to Kiribati, Nei Katherine described feeling motivated and enthused after the Community Conference. During the Women's Interest Seminar, the SPC agreed to fund the Community Education and Training Centre (CETC) to be based in Fiji by 1963. The CETC was established to offer training to women in, as the name suggests, community education. Community education during this period was aligned with a welfare approach towards women's development and largely entailed the training of women in home economics (primarily in cooking, sewing, nutrition and diet). Miss Marjorie Stewart became the first Director of the CETC. From Stewart's early vision, a regional approach to women's development based a modified welfare approach, which also encompassed early ideas of empowerment, towards Pacific women began. She adopted an approach that moved beyond a welfare focus to be broader and more encompassing, taking on women's

[219] Awira, (1975), op. cit., p 6

[220] Andersen, V. J. (1962). *Letter to Miss Marjorie Stewart, South Pacific Commission Women's Interests Officer from VJ Andersen Resident Commission of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, 22 September*. Unpublished manuscript.

development and early concepts of women's empowerment.[221] Writing in the *South Pacific Bulletin* in 1960, Miss Stewart put forth her vision:

> A women's club, or any form of women's advancement, consists in an education and experience beyond the mere homecraft or health or child-care class, essential as these are. A person may attend a course of ten cooking or sewing lessons, profit greatly, enjoy it quietly and exercise her new knowledge adequately, but she may have no increased perception of her privileges and responsibilities in the home and neighbourhood. Through the club she experiences an expansion of awareness – emotionally, intellectually and as a member of her community. To inspire local club leaders and helpers with a vision of this function is one aspect of the work known as 'Women's Interests'.[222]

In the article, 'Handbook for Leaders', Miss Stewart explained:

> The objective of the voluntary training approach is to encourage a healthy self-reliance in a women's work programme in isolated districts and islands. Women leaders are chosen by their own people as office-bearers and instructors. To enable them to function satisfactorily, a short term training is provided …while opportunity is sought to develop the capacity of the sewing, cooking, games and song leaders in their particular subjects, not only increasing their knowledge but helping them with the art of demonstration. So far in the clubs, practical subjects are taught mainly by a European helper living temporarily in the neighbourhood. However, where possible, she not only teaches the group but also takes pains to select a promising member to train as a future leader in the subject. Where Women's Work Officers function in a territory, one of their means of service is to plan for regular leadership training under different categories. The policy of promoting self-help through local trained leadership points to the necessity of providing ever-increasing opportunities for training courses.[223]

Regionally the Samoan Women's Interest Training Seminar was considered a success by the SPC. In the Annual Report for 1961, it concluded that:

> the seminar proved to be an outstanding success, and its recommendations provide an excellent basis for the further expansion of this work. When considering these recommendations the Commission authorized the recruitment of a home economist to extend the work already undertaken within the project and approved its development to include the wider

---

[221] Goodwillie, D (personal communication, May 12, 2008)
[222] Stewart, M. (1960, April). Women's interests in the Pacific. *South Pacific Bulletin,* p 43.
[223] ibid., p 46

> concerns of community education. The appointment of the Women's Interests Officer was authorized for a second term, and she will in 1962 extend her work to territories previously unvisited as well as developing it to accord with preliminary plans for community education which will be considered in detail at the Commission's regular 1962 session.[224]

The early leadership of Stewart and the initial response to the Seminar endorsed community education for women as a priority on the regional agenda and ensured that subsequent programs towards women's interests were well-funded.

In 1963, Stewart arrived in the Gilbert Islands to conduct a survey 'to enable her [to] submit to Government her recommendations on work connected with women's interests generally and on how to plan for the Women's Clubs of the future'.[225] In preparation for her visit and in response to the SPC's proposals to work through existing women's organisations and structures, the Resident Commissioner Andersen explained to Miss Stewart some potential problems:

> The Colony suffers from unusual geographical handicaps in that our villages are on small, flat islands scattered over a very wide expanse of ocean. Generations of existence on these islands has bred the curious combination of parochialism and a desire for variety in the narrow confines of an atoll environment. This means that although a new interest, such as a Women's Committee, may be readily adopted it is not easy to change the organisation of that interest once it has shaken down to a recognised local institution. This is what has happened with what are called Women's Committees, which exist on most of our islands…and were originally supposed to interest themselves in improving health on the islands...It has not been possible to give them a great deal of guidance and the Committees, which are largely dominated by the old women of the islands, are now concerned primarily with detecting infringements of local regulations and customs. They look inwards at what there is rather than outwards for new ideas and I understand it will not be easy to change this attitude.[226]

---

[224] South Pacific Commission, (1961), op. cit., pp 17-18
[225] Andersen, (1962), op. cit., p 1
[226] ibid

Despite these difficulties, Andersen stressed the importance of establishing a network of women's clubs:

> I am most anxious to foster progressive women's clubs on our islands because I am certain that without them it will not be possible to get many of the essential developments that the territory requires into the villages. The proposed clubs are so important that we must be careful not to put a foot wrong when we are getting them started.[227]

Andersen proposed a plan for the Colonial administration to support a Women's Interests Office for a limited period, flagging that once the phosphate becomes exhausted in 15-20 years, the organisation would need to be self-financed.[228] The SPC-led initiative to use existing women's committees within the Colony, as pre-empted by Resident Commissioner Andersen, later resulted in growing tension between pre-existing informal Church-based groups led by the *uniaine* (old women) and the newly formalised (and Colonially-backed) Home-maker Clubs. Despite the cautious remarks of the Resident Commissioner, plans to incorporate existing women's committees within a formalised and national structure went ahead.

During her visit, Mrs Stewart, Mr Andersen and Nei Katherine Tekanene made arrangements to send two delegates to the newly established CETC. Recognising the influence of the two dominant Churches, and the potential of the existing structures of the women's fellowships to promote community education, it was decided to send one delegate from the Protestant Church and another from the Catholic Church. The backing of the Churches also ensured the support of the

---

[227] ibid.
[228] ibid.

community as the social activities of most villages in the 1960s were centred on Church membership. In addition, it was decided to establish a Home Economics room at the Elaine Bernacchi School (EBS) where the graduates of the CETC, on return, would train local teachers to set up a home economics curriculum with a focus on nutrition and sewing. The regional SPC agenda was becoming embedded within the Colonial policy towards informal and formal education towards women and girls.

Concluding remarks

Within Gilbertese society the border-dweller women were seen as 'Gilbertese enough' to be respected by men and women but were 'not Gilbertese enough' in that their exposure to foreign concepts or foreigners (whether that by marriage to an *i-matang* or education abroad) afforded them an 'excuse' or a justification for their actions when challenging custom. Both the Colonial government and Gilbertese women can be seen to have taken advantage of the unique potential afforded through border-dweller status to advance women's interests.

On the other hand, 'real' Gilbertese women (in other words I-Kiribati women who abide by Kiribati custom) invoked their own cultural authenticity as a justification for their limitations when it comes to questioning or challenging custom. This does not place 'real' Gilbertese women in a position of passivity, simply following the lead of border-dweller women unquestionably. Rather, 'real' Gilbertese women

were able to (and actively chose to) collectively support border-dweller Gilbertese women, or as will be described in Chapter 6 in the case of Mrs Russell, chose collectively not to support them. Despite outside observations to the contrary, border-dweller women had an active role as change agents in the Colony. 'Being Gilbertese but not a real Gilbertese' enabled these women to take on leadership positions and opportunities to facilitate change within the Colony which, due to custom, would not have been a possibility for a 'real' Gilbertese woman. 'Being Gilbertese but not a real Gilbertese' allowed 'real' Gilbertese women a platform from which to break ground for future waves of Gilbertese and progression of the women's movement.

The first wave of women negotiated their border-dweller status and took advantage of their relationships with expatriates to successfully lay the foundations of a formalised structure for a Colony-wide women's interests program. A significant outcome of the first wave was the precedent set by the border-dwellers in becoming role models and providing an example for future waves of Gilbertese women. For instance, border-dweller women were able to literally speak in public and be heard at a time when customary restrictions would not have allowed a traditional Gilbertese woman to do so. Sanctioned and encouraged by the Colonial administration, the presence and active participation of women in the public realm became increasingly seen as 'normal'. The headway made by the border-dweller women broke down, to some extent, gendered boundaries. Through their uncustomary behaviours, border-dweller women gained some cultural acceptance for women's voices and were able to challenge traditionally-held patriarchal spaces.

Chapter 5

‘Pass it on’ –

Community Workers and the phenomenon

of Homemakers’ Clubs

In the first wave, the British Colonial administration identified border-dweller Gilbertese women to establish a program based on the South Pacific Commission’s regional agenda. To reinforce this, a British woman, a ‘European Helper’, was appointed to help lead the Gilbertese border-dweller women to adopt and deploy a formalised structure for the dissemination of an adult education program for all Gilbertese and Ellice Islander women. The second wave saw the emergence and growing numbers of both locally educated Gilbertese and Ellice Islander women (graduates of the Church and secular schools established in the mid and late 1950s respectively) and Community Education Training Centre (CETC) graduates returning, working closely with and influenced by border-dweller women. The growing number of Gilbertese nuns as CETC graduates was also influential during this time. The implementation of the Colonial administration’s women’s interests program can be viewed as a series of overlapping waves. This chapter examines the second wave of change and development in the women’s interests phenomenon in the Gilbert and Ellice Island Colony.

The period of the second wave is loosely considered to be from 1964, marking the year of the first returning graduates from the CETC, to 1971 with the election to parliament of border-dweller, Mrs Tekarei Russell, a significant high point in the women's interests movement. This period saw the creation of a network of non-denominational women's clubs known as the Homemakers' Clubs. The network was established and maintained by strengthened communications between urban South Tarawa (headquarters for the Women's Interests Office) and Outer Islands with monthly newsletters, bi-monthly radio broadcasts and annual tours of community workers to the islands and atolls. These measures were instrumental in the organisation and dissemination of information within the network of clubs. Greater communication also contributed to a growing sense of belonging and identity within the network of women's club. Significantly, this period saw many villages pursuing strong fundraising activities as Island Councils and community leaders on Outer Islands experienced a new enthusiasm for development.[229]

Members of women's clubs were pivotal in village-based fundraising efforts and their participation was increasingly acknowledged in numerous newspaper articles, Gilbert and Ellice Island Colony Information Notes, Hansard, reports and newsletters. This public acknowledgement helped to legitimise the work and raise the status of women's clubs at island, and later, as seen in their representation and participation in the 1977 Constitutional Convention, at a national level.

[229] Macdonald, (1982), op. cit., p 196

Women's clubs at this time benefited from the Resident Commissionership of VJ Andersen and his marked shift in Colonial policy to emphasise and provide greater funds towards education (both informal and formal and directed toward both girls and adult women) and humanitarian development initiatives. Women were encouraged and seen to have a legitimate role in providing resources towards economic development in the decolonisation period. Emphasising the significance of education, Resident Commissioner Andersen promoted a policy of 'education for change'. This resulted in a strong focus on social services in policies from 1962 to 1967.[230] Consequently, South Tarawa experiences a dramatic increase in the number of expatriate advisors and trainers, doubling between 1964 and 1970 as 'more expatriates were hired to train Islanders to take over positions held by Europeans'.[231] To improve the quality of education, British expatriate, Mrs Roddy Cordon, was appointed the Colony's Women's Interests Officer.[232] The impact of expatriates on the women's interests movement is significant in this period and culminates with the election to parliament of border-dweller Mrs Russell.

The second wave of women, through their CETC training, became trainers of trainers in community education. As a part of the South Pacific Commission's regional strategy for women's betterment, the second wave of women were crucial in the development of the 'pass it on' concept, whereby the dissemination of community education at a grassroots level was encouraged and supported. This in

[230] ibid. p 177
[231] ibid.
[232] Cordon, (1996), op. cit., p 1

itself was a challenge to custom as traditionally knowledge within Gilbertese society was seen as power and kept secret within the family. The introduction of a formalised women's network broke down this barrier to community engagement and women were encouraged to talk and share experiences. Influenced by the first and second wave women leaders and spokespersons, village women in the late 1960s and early 1970s began to see the benefits of challenging some aspects of customary restrictions if the ends was seen to be advantageous for the overall 'betterment' of the family and larger community.

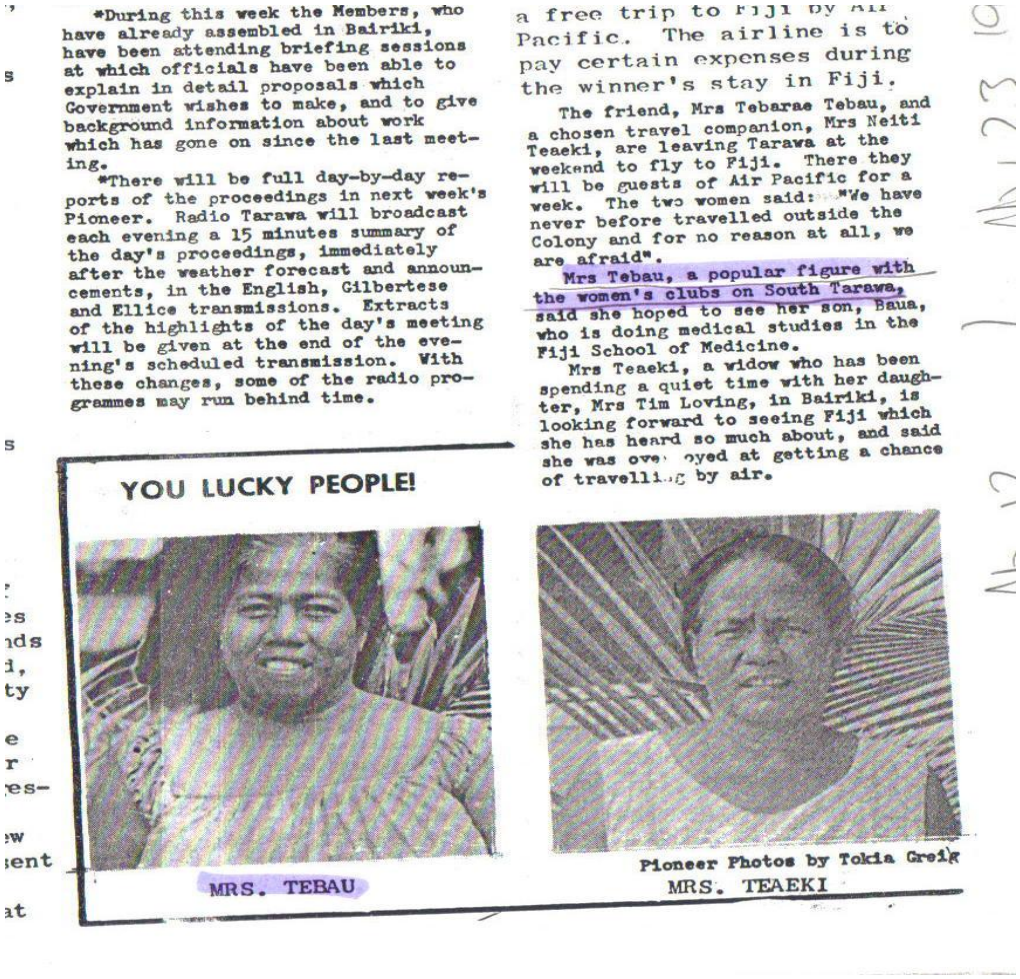
In line with regional and Colonial policy, by the mid-1960s, a formalised network of non-denominational women' groups –the Homemaker Clubs – began to emerge. The formalisation process of a national women's club network, rather than creating a network of non-denominational clubs at village level as intended by the Colonial administration, had unintended outcomes. By leveraging off the prominence of the Churches, the proposed network of non-denominational Homemaker Clubs resulted instead in the further cementing of rivalries and tensions of the pre-existing loosely formed Church-based groups. Rather than engendering new collective 'spaces' for women inclusive of all faiths, Homemaker Clubs were typically formed from the female membership of local congregations and further entrenched demarcations along Church lines. Local clubs were registered with the government as 'Homemakers' but were generally seen at village level as being either 'Catholic' or 'Protestant'. Gaining knowledge on how to collectively organise women through club structures, later on the third wave of women begin a process of fracturing the Homemaker network. Consequently, the second wave period

marks the significant growth and prominence of Church-based women's groups. For the Catholic women, this was achieved largely independently of the government sponsored Homemaker network, whereas the Protestant women essentially dominated the network.

By the late 1970s, over ninety percent of women identified as belonging to either a Church or village-based women's club. These clubs were active in fundraising and development activities at the community level. Women's clubs at this time were successful, firstly, in identifying a particular need of the community and secondly, effectively leading fundraising initiatives to address perceived needs to the benefit of all. For example, the building of local health clinics, *maneabas* and community centres were common during this period. Macdonald noted, 'a new enthusiasm for development evolved on the Outer Islands but some Councils and community leaders were caught between their desires and their means and resorted to fund-raising methods that revived customary obligations and practices'.[233] Women's clubs became increasingly respected for their community effort and gradually gained recognition in local politics by being represented in the Island Councils, consulted with for community initiatives and in many cases, relied on to fund community projects. Women's clubs became respected spaces for women to achieve a collective voice in village level decision making processes and became a major contributor to not only women's betterment but community development.

[233] Macdonald, (1982), op. cit., p 196

Female prestige within the community was intrinsically linked with involvement with women's groups. This link is best illustrated through the reporting on women's activities in the Atoll Pioneer. In numerous articles, whenever a woman's name was mentioned, her association with a woman's club was always noted. For example, in the article 'two win a free trip to Fiji', Mrs Tebau, the co-winner of a raffle, was identified as a popular figure with women's groups in South Tarawa. [234]



*During this week the Members, who have already assembled in Bairiki, have been attending briefing sessions at which officials have been able to explain in detail proposals which Government wishes to make, and to give background information about work which has gone on since the last meeting.

*There will be full day-by-day reports of the proceedings in next week's Pioneer. Radio Tarawa will broadcast each evening a 15 minutes summary of the day's proceedings, immediately after the weather forecast and announcements, in the English, Gilbertese and Ellice transmissions. Extracts of the highlights of the day's meeting will be given at the end of the evening's scheduled transmission. With these changes, some of the radio programmes may run behind time.

a free trip to Fiji by Air Pacific. The airline is to pay certain expenses during the winner's stay in Fiji.

The friend, Mrs Tebarae Tebau, and a chosen travel companion, Mrs Neiti Teaeki, are leaving Tarawa at the weekend to fly to Fiji. There they will be guests of Air Pacific for a week. The two women said: "We have never before travelled outside the Colony and for no reason at all, we are afraid".

Mrs Tebau, a popular figure with the women's clubs on South Tarawa, said she hoped to see her son, Baua, who is doing medical studies in the Fiji School of Medicine.

Mrs Teaeki, a widow who has been spending a quiet time with her daughter, Mrs Tim Loving, in Bairiki, is looking forward to seeing Fiji which she has heard so much about, and said she was overjoyed at getting a chance of travelling by air.

YOU LUCKY PEOPLE!

MRS. TEBAU

Pioneer Photos by Tokia Greig

MRS. TEAEKI

Image 9: Women's club members in the news [235]

[234] (1972, 23 November) Two win a free trip to Fiji. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 1
[235] ibid.

Similarly, the two female recipients of annual Queen's Birthday awards, Mrs Timeon and Mrs Tare, were acknowledged for their work with women's clubs.[236]

1st September, 1977

MRS TURIANA TARE, aged 53, from the island of Marakei.

Mrs Tare was educated at her home island by the nuns of the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1959, she joined the Women's Club. She became President of the Bikenibeu Club in 1972. She also teach local art such as weaving to youths in the village. It was then that staff in USP Centre took interest in her work and was employed part time teaching local skills to both Gilbertese and Imatang women. She is also a member of Welfare Committee looking after the affairs of Mental patients at the Tungaru Central Hospital. She is also an active member of the Catholic Church Committee.

Nei Turiana Tare

MRS TEBARAE Timeon, aged 46 of Abaiang was educated at Tuarabu village school.

Mrs Timeon is now President of Bikenibeu Women's Club. She joined the club in 1962.

She was also twice President of the Irekenrao Women's Association of South Tarawa, and last year she was a member of the Welfare Committee.

Image 10: Women's clubs members in the news[237]

[236] (1977, 1 September) Life histories of 8 locals with awards, *Atoll Pioneer*, pp 6-7
[237] ibid.

The collective strength of women's clubs and their respected status within traditional society invoked a further challenge to custom whereby women were increasingly seen as having a legitimate role outside the 'domestic/private' sphere. This collective voice and to some extent, legitimacy in the public realm, however, still remained restricted within the safeguarded space of the Church and activities considered to be that of 'women's work'. Women's clubs increasingly became a normalised feature of the Gilbertese religious sphere and social structure of the 1970s and played an active role in local community activities in the period leading to independence. While these women are often ignored in the historical literature or restricted to a footnote in the archives, their role in the history of Kiribati is paramount. The ability of these women to mobilise for social causes (such as fundraising), politically (such as in the case of the election of Mrs Russell discussed later in this chapter) and, as coined by Sharyn Marshall (1996), for 'the betterment of the family'[238], is significant.

By the early 1970s as the decolonisation process began, the potential for collective action by the Homemaker's network for political gain was being recognised by European advisor, Mrs Roddy Cordon and the first wave of border-dweller women as well as by second wave leaders. Encouraged and supported by Mrs Cordon and other expatriate women in the Colony, Mrs Tekarei Russell launched her campaign for the 1971 elections. By mapping the early political achievements of Gilbertese women through the election of Mrs Russell, this chapter traces the reasons for Mrs

[238] Marshall, S. (1996). For the betterment of the family: Women and empowerment in Kiribati. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Canterbury, New Zealand.p 75.

Russell's initial unprecedented success in remaining in parliament for two terms through her successful mobilisation of the Homemakers' network. In terms of collective political action, the election of a Mrs Russell marks a high point in the women's interests movement.

The Community Education Training Centre

One of the seven key recommendations from the South Pacific regional 1961 Women's Interest Training Seminar was the proposal to create a 'comprehensive education programme directed towards equipping girls and women to take part in public life and service'.[239] This was achieved in 1963 with the establishment of the regional Community Education Training Centre (CETC) based in Suva, Fiji.[240] Through collaboration between the South Pacific Commission and the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the aim of the CETC was to 'provide training in home economics for women who on their return home will be community workers, women's interests officers and home economics teachers'.[241] After the arrival of Miss Stewart to the Gilbert and Ellice Island Colony on the request of Resident Commissioner Andersen in 1963, and in partnership with the South Pacific Commission, it was agreed for the Colony to choose two young women, one from each of the prominent Churches, to attend the training course at

---

[239] Stewart, M. (1962, January). Partners in Progress: An account of the SPC Women's Interests Seminar held recently in Western Samoa. *South Pacific Bulletin*, p 29

[240] Kwain Sue, M. (n.d. c.1980). Community Education Training Centre (CETC). *Pacific Perspectives*, *2*(2), p 62

[241] ibid.

the CETC later that same year.[242] In September 1963 the two Gilbertese students arrived in Fiji and began their course at the CETC. Nei Theresa Tio was sent on behalf of Catholic women, and Nei Terubetake for the Protestant. Both were young, unmarried and heavily involved in the activities of their respected Churches and came from strong Church-based families. As highlighted in the case of Nei Katherine's visit to Samoa to attend the Women's Interest Training Seminar and the need for her to be chaperoned by her husband, it was important in the Colonial administration's selection to choose unmarried women so as to abide by custom.

The CETC course covered subjects that were intended to provide students with a broad general knowledge of home economics as well as to equip them with the skills needed to train others. The course included subjects focusing on 'foods and nutrition, home gardening, home management and improvement, clothing and textiles, family life and health, club organisation and community development approaches, teaching techniques, consumer education, and income generating activities'.[243] A practical component was also included as a part of the course whereby students were required to visit a local Fiji village and conduct a training session for the women – all skills needed for graduates to become community workers once they returned home. At the completion of the 10 month course, Nei Terubetake and Nei Theresa returned to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands and became community workers for the Colonial administration. This process of sending women to be trained in community education continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s

[242] Cordon, R. (1969). Newsletter for May of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 2
[243] Kwain, (n.d). op. cit., p 62

(and still continues today). By Independence in 1979, 36 women representing the Colony and their respective Churches had been trained at the CETC.[244]

Community Workers

On their return, the Colonial government provided funds for the CETC graduates (now trained community workers) to travel to each village on each atoll and island to form non-denominational government-based women's clubs. As communication was limited in the mid – 1960s, (radio was not accessible in all villages until the late 1960s and post via ships was time consuming), it was considered important that each village be visited individually by a community worker. The initial goal was to establish government-based non-denominational village women's groups (later to be known as Homemakers' Clubs) as a means to disseminate information on community education among all adult women. The 'pass it on' approach, a training mechanism taught at the CETC and adopted regionally, was embraced by community workers as a means of sharing knowledge and experience. In theory, each village would form a club which would include all adult women, hence making training accessible to all. Noting that by the mid-1960s only a small percentage of women had received any form of formal education (while the Protestant's had established a school for girls in 1913, the Catholics did not follow until 1955 and the first government school for girls was not opened until 1959), the network was to provide informal education to adult women targeted at

[244] Nu'ufou P. (2002). Report on duty travel to Kiribati, Annex 3: List of CETC Graduates, unpublished report.

knowledge that would improve basic family community life. This process of providing community education to all adult women through the women's club network was intended to encourage uniformity, a sense of friendship and belonging, and to establish a nationalised women's interests program.

In an attempt to strengthen the implementation of the national women's interests agenda, Mrs Roddy Cordon was appointed Woman Education Officer in 1965 for the Colony Government. In her own words, she was 'the first to be appointed to the Education Department, to be concerned with the formal education of all girls in the Colony, and the informal education of the women.'[245] Working closely with Mrs Roddy Cordon were Nei Katherine Tekanene and Nei Tekarei Russell (leaders of the first wave and intercultural border-dwellers) as well as the first community workers (and second wave leaders), Nei Tereubetaki Binoka Baati, Theresa Tio Leitala and later joined by Nei Ua Eritaia, Veronica Kauongo, Kairabu Kamoriki, Yanga Nemaia, Aneuea Eritaia, Terungake Tekaie, Katalaina Kokea, Lifa Ualetenese, and Liua Finekaso.[246] This group of women formed the Women's Interests Office based in Bikenibeu in urban South Tarawa.

Significantly, the first and second wave women shared similar characteristics and life experiences. From the case studies of the two key border-dweller women of the first wave, Tekarei Russell and Katherine Tekanene, it can be seen that access to Western forms of education played a critical role in determining leadership

[245] Roddy Cordon, (1996), op. cit. p 1
[246] Nu'ufou P. (2002), op. cit.

positions within the women's interests movement. In addition, both women were educated abroad, as one interview participant explained, 'our leaders in this time were women that had been overseas'.[247] In describing the first wave of women, the interview participant explained that the initial women who led the movement were women who had been brought up in Fiji and exposed to Western ideas. These women were also married, Tekanene to a doctor educated abroad and Russell to an American expatriate.

Border-dweller women were identified as having access to Western knowledge through their friendships with *i-matang* women. It was explained that:

> These women can speak up (eg Tekerai Russell and Katherine Tekanene)… These women are friends with Europeans…They can talk and speak to European women.[248]

In contrast, 'Kiribati women listen' as is culturally appropriate as opposed to speaking up. It was identified through interviews that the key background ideas regarding women's interests stemmed from border-dweller women. This was largely a result of their fluency in the English language and educational levels.

The ability to speak English and access to education are also common characteristics of the second wave women as it was a necessary requirement in order to attend the CETC. As such, the representatives who attended on behalf of the Colony were women who had access to at least a primary level of education. The missionaries had offered the only access to education for girls prior to 1959. It

---

[247] Tira, R. (personal communication, March 16, 2009)
[248] ibid.

is therefore not surprising that second wave women were largely the daughters of pastors or influential Catholic families (and later Sisters).

For example, the father of Terubetake Binoka Baati, who was one of the first Colony women to attend the CETC, was a pastor. Terubetake was educated at the London Missionary Society School on Abaiang and later attended the Protestant School for Girls on Rongorongo, Beru (her mother's home island). Prior to attending the CETC, Terubetake had been a teacher from 1955 to 1963.[249] Nei Theresa Tio, chosen as the Catholic Church representative attended the CETC with Terubetake, was he Protestant delegate, in the first group of Colony women in 1963.

The Catholic Church originally chose housewives to attend the CETC but after seeing the success of the training, increasingly began to send nuns. Cordon provided the following explanation, 'Since Nei Tio had worked so satisfactorily, the Catholic Church prepared to send their Sisters to train in Suva – Sister Consilio was the first to go, with Teneeti in 1970'.[250] The role of nuns in this space became increasingly acknowledged as 'the nuns sent to Fiji...were found to be more than students…and so the sisters (nuns) became lecturers'.[251]

It was also crucial that women who attended the CETC had the support of their families and husbands. Cordon provided some insight into the family life that supported the individuals who were the second wave of community workers

[249] Baati Binoka, T. (personal communication, April 6, 2009)
[250] Cordon, (1998), op. cit. p 173
[251] Baiteke, I. (personal communication, May 22, 2007)

trained at the CETC. The father of Ua Eritai, a 1965 CETC graduate, and Aneuea Eritaia, who graduated from the CETC in 1969, was a popular Protestant Minister. Cordon reflected in her memoirs:

> Arrangements in Ua's home life were obviously different. I recall an occasion when a great feast was to be held there, and either Ua or Aneuea was put by their father in charge of the whole operation. All the young men around were instructed that they must do as they were asked, so one went fishing, another collected coconuts, another toddy, another fuel (coconut husks) for the baking, another to draw water from the well, another to cut leaflets for the making of food baskets, and so on. All worked well without questioning the right of the woman to allocate the jobs.[252]

Cordon highlighted the importance of the role of a supportive husband and family for community workers, as a 'housewife could only take a year off her homely duties if the extended family were prepared to help and, of course, the husband were willing'.[253] Liua Finekaso, a Tuvaluan, graduated from the CETC in 1972. Her husband, Taui Finekaso, was Chief Clerk in the Education Department. Cordon described her as 'fluent in both Ellice and Gilbertese, was extremely conscientious and a tower of strength'[254] and her husband as 'the kindest and most helpful of men; I never heard him complain of any matter while directing our busy Education Office'.[255]

Kairabu Kamoriki, who graduated in the same year as Taui Finekaso, is described by Cordon as 'being a single girl, had consequently fewer duties and her family were able to face her absence with equanimity, though no doubt they missed her

---

[252] Cordon, (1998), op. cit., pp 165-166
[253] ibid., p 168
[254] ibid., p 167
[255] ibid., p 168

ready smile and willing hands'.[256] Kairabu Kamoriki was to become a Coordinator of AMAK and later a dietician. She unsuccessfully campaigned in the 1998 national elections alongside Ianeta 'Claire' Baiteke.

In many cases, the marital status of the community worker impacted their ability to work in the community and Outer Islands. Some community workers left the Women's Interests Office once married. For example Veronica Kauongo, who graduated from the CETC in 1966, and became a community worker in South Tarawa, 'left at the end of 1968 to get married'[257] and moved to Nauru. She later became instrumental in the preschool movement. CETC graduates who continued working for the Women's Interests Office once married typically had husbands in either high administrative positions within the Colonial Government or were professionals such as a doctor.

Rita Tira, a member of the National Council of Women and prominent leader in the RAK during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s explains, a woman 'need(s) to have a supportive husband…If you don't have his support you won't have a very good home, a happy home… (it is a) part of Christian life'.[258] Rita is married to a doctor and credits him for much of her successful career through his support.

In the first wave of women, Katherine was married to a doctor and Tekarei to an *i-matang*. In addition to Liua Finekaso whose husband was the Chief Clerk in the

[256] ibid.
[257] Ibid., p 167
[258] Tira, R. (personal communication, March 16, 2009)

Education Department, fellow Tuvaluan Katalaina Kokea (nee Malua), a CETC graduate of 1974, married 'the only pharmacist to serve the Colony'.[259]

Some women, for example, Terubetake, chose never to marry, never married. After working as a community worker for the Colony from 1964 to 1968, Terubetake decided to leave the work to her fellow graduates and do her own work for the Church. She later played a significant role in the development of the RAK. In the early 1980s she was an advocate and played a leading role in move towards allowing I-Kiribati women to serve as pastors in the Kiribati Protestant Church.[260] Although Terubetake never married, through the custom of adoption in Kiribati, she was still able to experience motherhood.

The foregoing portrayal of the characteristics and backgrounds of the women who played key roles in the early women's movement in I-Kiribati supports the primary contention of this thesis of the importance of border-dweller status as enabling of women's individual and collective capacity to challenge custom and traditional gender roles. The selection of women for leadership on the basis of criteria related to their border-dweller status was a deliberate strategy of the Colonial plan based on recognition of the important role of education and cross-cultural experiences. By the early 1970s, the concept of community workers as conduits for passing on community education and playing a pivotal role in grassroots community

[259] Cordon, (1998), op. cit., p 169
[260] Baati Binoka, T. (personal communication, April 6, 2009)

development was being acknowledged and exploited by the Colonial Government and increasingly by the Churches.

Homemakers' Clubs

In 1966, the Office implemented a policy of club registration. The aim was to have a registered club in every village and 'every woman in each village a member of (the) progressive forward-looking Colony Group'.[261] Each village that intended to set up a women's club were required to take 'The Promise' and register the club with the Women's' Interest Office at headquarters. 'The Promise' comprised of four key objectives that women individually and as a club agreed to adhere to. These were:

1. To search for knowledge and wisdom;
2. To try to improve their homes, villages and islands;
3. To do something special for their community each year;
4. To send to H.Q. [headquarters] a monthly report of their activities.[262]

The author of 'The Promises' is unknown, but as the commencement of monthly newsletters coincided with the arrival of Mrs Cordon in 1965, followed shortly by the implementation of the policy of registration of clubs in 1966, one can assume that the idea was instigated by Mrs Cordon in collaboration with her team at the Women's Interests Office . Once registered, a club would receive a monthly newsletter and any additional supplements for that month. Annually, the

[261] Cordon, (1968). Newsletter for January of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q. Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 3
[262] Cordon, (1968). Newsletter for October of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q. Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 3

community worker from Tarawa would then visit the club and conduct training sessions as outlined in the Women's Interest work program for that year. The staff at headquarters, the Women's Interests Officer and community workers would meet every December with the Church-based community workers to agree on the work program for the following year and to divide up the tours accordingly. In return, the registered clubs were required to report monthly back to headquarters on their activities and send through any requests for information or training. The clubs were also expected to pay a subscription of 50 cents, either in cash or in handicrafts to the equivalent value. While the process of registration, paying subscriptions and reporting monthly had potential to create a self-financed network of women's clubs, the approach was foreign and not well understood by women in the villages.

The newsletters along with the template for registration, forms for reporting and fulfilling the Promises, were all written in English.[263] The approach to circulate newsletters written in a foreign language (English) was a poor choice. Adult women in Outer Island villages, who by the mid-1960s had been exposed to minimal educational opportunities, found the information was just not accessible. For example, only two clubs out of a registered 122 in 1967 regularly submitted monthly reports back to headquarters.[264] The process of newsletters and reporting was a Western construct that, while embraced to a certain extent more widely in later years, caused frustration at both ends, as Mrs Cordon wrote in her July 1968

[264] Cordon, (1968). Newsletter for July of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q. Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 2

newsletter to the Colony Homemaker's Clubs, 'Most of you sent in some reports, but some of you did not send in any at all. Please send in your reports EVERY MONTH'.[265] Despite this, the format of disseminating monthly English-written newsletters continued until the late-1970s; the content of which provides insight into the intentions of headquarters and hoped for impact on the atolls of the women's interests program.

Monthly newsletters attempted to expose the women of the Colony to the wider world. The basic format of each newsletter opened with the salutation 'Dear friends' followed by a short article on a topic of interest intended to provide some form of informal education and general knowledge to the reader. The articles of interest covered topics ranging from history lessons (a series on Ancient Rome), customs and traditions from other places (series titled 'women of the world'), science lessons (explanation of the universe), animals of the world, Biblical stories and lessons on geography (particularly how islands and atolls are formed). Mrs Cordon attempted to align the topic of interest article with current developments in the Colony. For example, in her 1969 series on the history of Ancient Rome (two years after women were granted suffrage), Mrs Cordon highlighted stories from Ancient Rome as examples of democratic processes and the importance of good representation in government. This was intentionally timely as it juxtaposed calls for responsible government in the Colonial administration.[266] She wrote:

---

[265] ibid.
[266] Cordon, (1969). Newsletter for August of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 1

> Since we are thinking just now about government and the characteristics we look for in the people we choose to take office and to have the responsibility of making our laws, and also because this is the month of Augustus Caesar, our quotation is from Saint Paul's letter to Timothy, Book 1, Chapter 3. "…He (or she!) must be blameless…vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine; no striker, not greedy of money, but patient; one that ruleth well in his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity…".[267]

Mrs Cordon encouraged women to think beyond their homes and villages and consider issues relating to their position in the Colony, region and wider world.

While the format of the newsletters were quite fluid, they would typically include four pages of short articles outlining changes in the Colony (topics ranged from politics, law, policy to development and social issues such as family planning and urbanisation), health or nutritional information (including recipes, maternal and child health information, sanitation and hygiene), tips for good homemaking (how to set up a latrine, kitchens, importance of cleaning, washing etc), club organisation (how to set up a club, elections of office bearers, role of officer bearers, training, how to run a club meeting), news from the clubs (club fundraising and community activities), news from headquarters (update on tours of community workers, correspondence from abroad such as developments with the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), SPC, CETC, UNESCO, and FAO) and ended with a quotation of the month (often a Bible verse).

[267] Cordon, (1969). Newsletter for June of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 4

The articles were complemented by hand-drawn illustrations. In addition to the monthly newsletters, supplements were also dispatched regularly. The supplements provided further details and information that would assist women either in the running of their club or with their club activities. Supplements on a range of topics were circulated, such as sewing, cutting of patterns, care and maintenance of sewing machine, nutrition (leaflets on the three food groups), recipes (mostly on how best incorporate 'greens' in family diets as well as how to cook with introduced staples such as flour and rice, but also included some not so nutritious food goods such as coconut ice and coconut meringues[268]), agricultural lessons and gardening advice, the keeping of pigs and poultry, household hints and cleaning tips ('look at your house through the eyes of the Queen'[269]) as well as information on how to organise a club.

The community worker during their tour would train the office bearers of the clubs on how to train their women members using the supplement materials. The newsletters also included a regular feedback section 'Ask Nei Tetuabine' – the spider who 'sits in the roof of your house and watches, listens and thinks. Then she asks questions'.[270] This column provided an opportunity for clubs to write in and ask for advice on matters of concern to them. It is evident that the newsletters and associated supplements and training conducted by the community workers during

[268] Cordon, (1968). Newsletter for November of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 3
[269] Cordon, (1970). Newsletter for April of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 1
[270] Cordon, (1968). Newsletter for October of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa. p 3

their island tours made a concerted effort to incorporate feedback from clubs into their annual work program and newsletters. It could also be argued Nei Tetuabine was Mrs Cordon's avenue for challenging women to think critically and encouraging curiosity and questioning. The idea of being critical and challenging was a concept and way of thinking not nurtured in traditional Gilbertese society.[271] When women did display tenacity for learning, it came as a shock to Mrs Cordon, as she wrote in 1969, 'I have been delighted to realise that there are many really deeply-thinking women among you. Minds need food. Just as the body does'.[272]

The role of the newsletters in encouraging women to learn English is a key example of challenging negative attitudes towards changes to custom and society. While Mrs Cordon noted the high level of interest expressed by clubs in their requests for assistance in learning English, there was also a strong reluctance at the village level. The Homemakers' Clubs played a role in helping to facilitate lessons and to change attitudes. Mrs Cordon instructed women club members:

> If you really want to learn English, you must be prepared to work at it every day. You must be prepared for other people who are lazier and not so forward-looking as you to laugh at you. When they say, "Are you trying to be an I-Matang?" you must answer, "No. I don't want to be an I-Matang. But I do want to be a Gilbertese with enough sense to learn a second language and (a) very useful language when I've got the opportunity." If they still laugh, it is best to take no notice.[273]

Mrs Cordon encouraged women to practice and learn English from their children who were taught it at school. Significantly, the newsletters introduced Western

---

[271] Talu, (1992), op. cit., p 178
[272] Cordon, (1969). Newsletter for February of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 1
[273] Cordon, (1968). Newsletter for May of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 2

notions of parenting, and at times, Mrs Cordon wrote quite forcefully (and perhaps with a belittling undertone) providing advice on how women should be 'better mothers'. An interesting example of this was the May 1969 newsletter. Coinciding with Resident Commissioner Andersen's policy of implementing family planning measures in the Colony,[274], a didactic article stressed the importance of sex education for children. This was quite a challenge to the traditional parent-child relationship. A Report to the Resident Commission in 1968 observed, 'child rearing seems to be based on the use of negative sanctions'[275] and that 'children learnt by imitation rather than insight'.[276] Furthermore, the authors of the 1968 Report inferred that for children to 'question is to challenge things as they are, to question is to invade the adult world, it is almost being rude to ones parents' and made reference to the strong discouragement of sexual curiosity in children.[277] Going against this, Mrs Cordon encouraged women to explain sex to their children and to promote and nurture curiosity and inquisitiveness. Mrs Cordon went so far as to preach:

> If your children don't ask questions- ask yourself why. Are they ill? Sick children aren't curious. Are they undernourished? Or too well fed with the wrong foods? Are you bringing them up seek knowledge and wisdom? If not, why not?'.[278]

---

[274] Macdonald, (1982), op. cit., p 173
[275] McCreary & Boardman, (1968), op. cit., p 40
[276] ibid., p 41
[277] ibid.
[278] Cordon, (1969). Newsletter for May of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 1

Reiterating the first of the Promises, 'to search for knowledge and wisdom'[279], Mrs Cordon encouraged women to apply this to their children as well as to themselves. The issue of good parenting was raised the following month when Mrs Cordon wrote, 'a tired child cannot learn well, because he cannot give his whole mind to it. So parents who really care for their children see to it that they are in bed and asleep by a reasonable time each night'.[280] Mrs Cordon, following the lead of European advisors in the South Pacific Commission, saw that to be a 'good mother' in the Western sense of the term was crucial to the development of women in the Colony.

Being a 'good Christian' was also paramount to being a good citizen and club member. Newsletters regularly encouraged club members to act as Jesus would and as God wanted and, as outlined in the second of The Promises, be good members of the community by doing good deeds.[281] Suggestions for how to achieve this included asking club members to take turns supporting the elderly members of the village who had no family, to be accepting of all people, and in particular, not to tease mental patients and teach children to be accepting also. Furthermore, women were encouraged to be 'good wives'. The newsletters encouraged women to work in harmony with men and were swift to highlight incidences where men displayed positive attitudes towards the work of the

[279] Cordon, (1968). Newsletter for October of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 3
[280] Cordon, (1969). Newsletter for June of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 1
[281] Cordon, (1968). Newsletter for October of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 3

women's clubs. One of them drew from a regional example from Papua New Guinea:

> at a course for women leadership, one woman gave birth to a daughter, and could not continue in the work of the course. However, her husband, who had come to act as interpreter, also took part in the practical sessions and completed his wife's sewing as well!.[282]

Newsletters regularly commented on the changing attitude of men and their support towards women's clubs. A typical example is captured in the following note:

> It is very encouraging to see that every year more and more men are taking an interest in the activities of our Homemakers' Clubs… and one club…has seven men enrolled as members. Miss Gwilliam told us last March that the idea of women's clubs came in the first place from men!.[283]

The Women's Interests Office encouraged a gender complementarity approach whereby women were to work alongside men for the betterment of their families and villages. Island tour reports from community workers echoed similar sentiments and where positive attitudes by men were displayed towards the work of their training sessions with the clubs, the community workers regularly reported on it. The reason for this stems from an apparent animosity felt by men towards the growing popularity of the women's club movement and women's access to adult education. As two New Zealand observers noted:

> part of the function of women's committees and the instruction supplied by the Missions, expatriate wives and trained community educators as a necessary part of the Committee's existence. There is, therefore, a very real

[282] Cordon, (1968). Newsletter for May of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 1
[283] Cordon, (1968). Newsletter for May of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, 1

> danger that adult education will become identified as the preserve of women and a womanish activity.[284]

This provided an explanation of the effect of the socio-economic changes experienced by the Colony during the 1960s and concluded that men and women were impacted quite differently. The Report noted:

> An explanation for this state of affairs could well be that women are in many ways the most closely affected by the changes which have occurred in the Colony… At a deeper level the role of women is under-going a change…their children are being educated and a woman's view of her own status is beginning to alter. Membership in a women's committee or club is part of this change. As one woman informant said, "At the Women's club we seem to feel different – more confident". The part played by Women's Clubs as change agents, then, strengthens their appeal and the attractiveness of the instruction accompanying club activity.[285]

In contrast, the experience for men was described as:

> Men's life has been affected differently by forces for change. Although, objectively, those who work for cash may seem to have their lives much more extensively altered than is the case with women, their domestic existence is comparatively untouched. Men certainly have to learn new skills but these are mostly taught, or picked up, on the job. There are no skills a man can learn, other than those related to his paid employment, which can enhance his feelings of worth in a way equivalent to that achieved by a woman in her acquisition of new domestic techniques.[286]

In an attempt to explain the animosity of men towards women and their work and newfound enthusiasm towards adult education and as members of a women's club, the Report concluded:

> as far as our informants are concerned, the chief reason advanced for adult education for males is that women are receiving instruction and it is only fair that men should get something too. [287]

---

[284] McCreary & Boardman, (1968), op. cit., p 23
[285] ibid.
[286] ibid.
[287] ibid., p 24

The hostility of men towards the work of the women's clubs was reported in the Colony Information Notes in January 1971. In outlining the progress of Women's Interests in the Colony, the article dismissed these attitudes:

> the community and welfare workers…work with the women through Home Makers Clubs, and although the male population may feel neglected or may not see their importance, these clubs, having absorbed proper understanding of how and why they should function, on a suitable pattern and with the necessary interest inspired, could play no small part from village life to territorial affairs.[288]

This is interesting in that reflecting on her time in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, Mrs Cordon in her memoirs wrote of the low status afforded to women, commenting 'a wife ranked somewhere below his canoe, his house and his children in the opinion of many a man.'[289] Despite this, she continued to stress the importance of working in collaboration with men.

At the onset of her arrival, Mrs Cordon was keen raise the awareness of women to political developments in the Colony. Newsletter articles were regularly dedicated to informing women on government procedures and reporting on updates from the House of Representatives. For example, an overview of Sitting 2 of Session 2 of 1969 reported the recognition of the Resident Commissioner of the work of the women's club network:

> In his opening speech His Honour the Resident Commissioner drew attention to the work of the women's clubs, and to the women who are serving on Island Councils. This is what he said: "It is pleasing to report that a number of women have been elected on the new Councils, and that on three islands the vice-presidents are women. I believe this is a sign that the people of our islands are aware that women should share in the work of

---

[288] (1971, 21 January) Women's Interests in the Colony. *Colony Information Notes,* pp 5-6
[289] Cordon, (1996), op. cit., p 5

> government, and that it is a sign of political maturity. Perhaps, in the not too distant future, women may play a part in deliberations of the House of Representatives'.[290]

Drawing again on the need for assurance from men that the work of women's clubs was worthwhile, Mrs Cordon wrote:

> It is good to hear of even one man who realises that women are able to assist in making decisions for their islands and for their Colony, but when that one man if the representative of the Queen, and speaks from many years of experience in directing government, then all women should take heart and express their opinions.[291]

Mrs Cordon urged women to become more politically involved, engaged and active:

> I hope you have been listening to the reports of proceedings in the House of Representatives, and I hope that you are obtaining copies of Tero and Valu and reading the reports also. These proceedings are definitely <u>your business</u>. Your representatives are discussing things that affect <u>your present and future lives'</u>.[292]

This foundation of encouraging women to become politically conscious was to lay the foundation for Mrs Russell's successful campaign three years later.

The newsletters encouraged Outer Island women to consider themselves as part of a wider group of Colony women. There was a strong emphasis on creating unity through friendship. Each newsletter would open with the greeting 'Dear Friends' and sign off with 'your friend'. The writing style was in the first person, conversational, informal and read more so as a personal letter or an advice column (at times quite patronising), than a newsletter. Continual and regular reference was made to club women as belonging to a friendship circle. In June 1968, the

---

[290] Cordon, (1969). Newsletter for June of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 2
[291] ibid.
[292] ibid.

introduction of a regular bi-monthly radio broadcast, 'Listening Time for Women', targeted specifically for women's club members further cemented this idea of a friendship circle, as Mrs Cordon in announcing the broadcasts wrote, 'we are glad to be able to speak at one time to every woman in the Colony whether she is a member of our group or not. If she is a member, we know we are talking to a friend; if she is not, we hope she soon will join her local club, and so she is a friend-to-be'. It is therefore not surprising that when the National Women's Federation was eventually formed in 1982, the women chose to name it *Aia Maea Ainen* Kiribati (AMAK) – the Kiribati women's ring of friendship. While the impact of the newsletters if difficult to quantify, the concept of friendship continues to be intrinsically linked with women's interests and development in Kiribati.

A key feature of the newsletters in terms of advocating for social change was to challenge aspects of custom that negatively impacted on women. Identifying the needs of village women as well as being able to recognise 'bad' customs that needed to be changed was an approach adopted by the SPC and became an element of the training course at the CETC. The 1968 Report to the Resident Commissioner observed, 'sometimes customs outlive their value because the people are not aware of alternatives'.[293] The Report went on to note that 'a case could be made for using women's groups or adult education facilities to present alternatives'.[294] It is clear that Mrs Cordon took heed of this Report and the SPC approach and incorporated the concept of challenging custom regularly in the

[293] McCreary & Boardman, (1968), op. cit., p 10
[294] ibid.

newsletters. In the Colony Information Notes in 1971, Mrs Cordon described Women's Interests as encompassing three key aspects – the family, the village and the Colony:

> As house wives they need to possess a sound knowledge of home economics, they will be faced with the raising of children to guarantee them a good start in life, they will need to enlighten the home and try to keep the family happy, they will try to settle differences between them and their husbands in a sweet way. As members of a village community they will need to acquaint themselves with all aspects of village life through which they exist and put forward suggestions – not just for the men to decide, they will want to learn – to establish local markets for their agricultural products and handicrafts, they must maintain and make sure that their knowledge of traditional skills in woven articles, traditional dancing, cooking are all passed on for the information of others in the village and on the island. They will need to keep abreast with the trend of island affairs, get to know regulations passed on by the Island Council and their purposes, recognise their right to seek advice or information, or question the Islands Council officials, doctors and family planners, district officers, education officers etc. etc.

Cordon continued:

> As member citizens of the Colony the women, like their more ambitious opposite sex, are entitled to all territorial rights, including being able to vote in the coming election. So they should know what the territorial government is doing for them, they should listen to debates in the Legislative Council and understand the legislations passed, they need to know the functions and operation of the Development Authority and why prices of essential as well as luxurious imported items keep going up and why that of copra keeps fluctuating. And why cannot the women start building a "road" across the passage from Betio to Bairiki before we start begging other countries to do it for us?[295]

Newsletters reveal there was a quick take-up of clubs but that these would often register and then the enthusiasm would wane. Community workers re-visited villages to help re-activate the club members. Tours included preparations for clubs

[295] Cordon, R cited in (1971, 21 January) Women's Interests in the Colony. *Colony Information Notes*, pp 5-6

to join island level Associations of Homemakers' Clubs, known as *Irekenrao,* a policy introduced in 1969. The idea was for each village to establish a Homemaker's Club and for each island to then have an Association which represented all the clubs. A member, typically the President, of the Association would then be the island's delegate and would represent all of the Homemakers of that island. This process of electing club representatives at village and island level mirrored that of Colonial democratic developments towards self-government.

Island Associations of Homemakers' Clubs - Irekenrao

By 1968, the first *Irenkenrao* - Association of Clubs at island level – was formed on South Tarawa. By 1971, the majority of islands had formed an *Irekenrao.* The *Irekenrao* were encouraged to work closely with Island Councils and to represent Women's Interests at the Island level. As early as 1969, plans were being made to form a national structure which would represent all of the women of the Colony through the Homemaker's network. Mrs Cordon wrote, 'when enough islands have reached this stage, we shall think about forming a Federation of Associations, so that a representative of all the clubs on each island can be nominated to attend a Colony meeting'.[296] The 1968 Report to the Resident Commissioner recommended the Colony support the Women's Interests Office policy of forming a Federation and utilising women through clubs as a means of facilitating social change. The Report, however, flagged funding as a potential issue and recommended:

[296]Cordon, (1969). Newsletter for January of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 3

> The Women's Committees… are probably more effective if encouraged to experiment in action, gain strength from successes and learn by their failures. Their growth should…be encouraged by financial and other assistance. In particular, their present policy to form federations of women's groups may need assistance to ensure adequate opportunities for communication between groups.[297]

In 1971, enough progress had been made across the atolls and the first Colony Conference of Homemakers' Clubs was held. On the first page under the heading 'National Women's Conference', the *Colony Information Notes* reported:

> The Colony Homemakers' Club Conference which is running for the whole of this week was officially opened at the Tarawa Teachers' College (TCC) last Friday morning by Lady Field. Twenty nine delegates from each island in the Colony, one from Fanning in the Line Islands and invited guests including the Director of Education attended. In a welcome speech, the Social Education Officer, Mrs Cordon, made a brief account of the history of the women's clubs and paid tribute to the dedication of Community Workers and the women for their support.
>
> Lady Field next addressed the conference and explained in some detail the meaning of the theme of the conference which was: Understand, Think and Act. She said that the women in the Colony today had achieved a higher standard of living than those of 30 years ago and urged women to accept the rapid changes in the Colony.
>
> The guests and the delegates were later taken to see a model home unit and then had tea in the TTC dining room. After tea the delegates received a talk on Island Administration by Ten Ata Teaota of the District Office. Similar lectures were arranged throughout this week and the subjects covered many spheres of the government. The women also gained much from practical demonstrations about things in a home and it is hoped that the delegates will pass on what they have learnt here when they return to their clubs.[298]

[297] McCreary & Boardman, (1968), op. cit., pp 32-33
[298] (1971, 22 April) National Women's Conference. *Colony Information Notes*, 1971, 22 April, 1

Fundraising and community initiatives

While the Women's Interests Office at headquarters was arranging conferences, devising Colony-wide policies and implementing strategies for developing a sustainable national framework for women's organisation, in the villages members of clubs were pursuing their third Promise of doing 'something special for their community each year'.[299] This largely entailed fundraising initiatives. Women's clubs at the village level were successful in mobilising women for community projects. Women's clubs became the primary fundraisers for local infrastructure. Interviews with women revealed numerous and varied community initiatives that were instigated, funded and implemented by women's clubs throughout Tarawa and the Outer Islands. The following excerpts from the national newspaper *Atoll Pioneer* provide a snapshot of the various fundraising activities and community projects women's clubs throughout Kiribati were involved in during the 1970s. For example women fundraised towards the construction of a local courthouse in Arorae:

> [At] the annual general meeting of the Titaron Irekenrao Women's Club at the Marewen Arorae maneaba last week… It was unanimously agreed by club members that they would raise money for the construction of the court house in permanent materials. During the evening, they held an Island Night which raised $23.85 for the fund, giving a total of $100.78, so far.[300]

Within 19 months the courthouse at Arorae was complete. The 'Women's Clubs on the island raised $1500 towards the cost of the building by organising island nights

[299] Cordon, (1968). Newsletter for October of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 3
[300](1972, 12 October). Arorae Women's Club. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 16

and sales'.[301] Women's clubs also fundraised for the cost of construction of *maneabas*. For example in 1976, the Catholic *Maneaba* at Takoraonga Betio was opened and was named Tiantake, in honour of the Tiantake Women's Club on Betio, which [had] contributed about $900 towards the cost of the *maneaba*'.[302] Importantly, women's clubs did not work in isolation, rather were involved in joint community projects such as the council *maneaba* at Taburaoin Abaiang which was completed in 1978 and was financed by 'the "Ainente Mweraoi" a women's community association and the *Botaki n Unimanen Uen Abaiang* or the Abaiang Old Men Association.'[303]

Women's clubs were also successful at applying the skills they had learnt through the training to produce items that they could then sell to raise funds for community projects. For example, one club, 'recently sent another donation of $100 to the Red Cross, which does such good work for our people. All members of the club made shell baskets, bead necklaces, small canoes, and dyed pillow cases, sheets and bedcovers for a bazaar held in the *maneaba* at which they raised $402'.[304] Women's clubs also donated time and handicrafts towards community projects such as in the case of the donation of 'one thousand thatches, and 4, 000 fathoms of string' to the Beru Island Council in 1976, 'so that the council could proceed with its building programmes within the Government's station at Tabukinberu'.[305]

---

[301](1974, 4 April). Courthouse at Arorae. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 3.
[302](1973, 9 August). Catholic Maneaba opened. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 2
[303](1978, 30 March). MHA invited to maneaba opening. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 1
[304] Cordon, (1968). Newsletter for June of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa, p 1
[305] (1976, 1 July). A helping hand from the women. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 2

An important finding in the development of women's interests is that the formation of women's clubs allowed a space from which women could collectively voice their opinions at the local government level. For example, as Mrs Cordon has encouraged through her newsletters, '[a]t a recent meeting of the Women's Association at Bauriki, in North Tarawa, it was agreed that a representative of the Association would be present during all council meetings to give views of the Association.'[306] The relationship between Island Councils and women's clubs in many islands became one of mutual assistance and to the financial benefit, in many cases, of the Island Council. For example, '[a]bout 300 people attended a special meeting between the Island Council and Women's Federation at Tabiteuea South at the week-end. The Island Executive Officer said that the women's club donated $100 in response to an appeal by the council for financial aid'.[307]

One of the most fondly remembered moments of the fundraising work of women's clubs by many Protestant women interviewed was the opening of the *maneaba* in Abaiang. The *Atoll Pioneer* reported in 1978:

> In his opening address, the Chief Minister congratulated the Abaiang Women Association for raising the fund which paid for the construction of the Maneaba and the men for doing the construction work. He felt that their united efforts had resulted in a very magnificent Maneaba even though it took almost 10 years to complete…But the women were the driving force behind the whole exercise. They organised all sorts of activities to raise enough money to pay for it. The women deserve to be commented" the Chief Minister went on, "and I am glad that they have named the Maneaba "TE RUNGA-N-AINE" (The United Gathering of Women). He concluded by saying that the Maneaba is now a good example

[306] (1974, 7 March) Women's Clubs to give views. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 2
[307] (1973, 12 July). $100 Donation. *Atoll Pioneer,* p 3

> for his Government, who must have a spirit of co-operation and stamina and courage to tackle all problems that they may encounter now and in the future.[308]

Andersen pursued a policy of expanding the available revenue source base and women's clubs were mobilised to fulfil the demand for the overseas handicraft market.[309] Working closely with the Co-operative Federations, women played a critical role in supplying products for this market. In 1968, 'the Co-operative Federation disclosed that there had been an increase in the number of handicrafts exported from the Colony… A further order of 200 mats has been received from OXFAM, which bought a total of 650 floor mats in 1967… The search is still being made for more markets overseas.'[310] Through these and other activities, as well as their participation in women's clubs and co-operative societies, meant that women were playing an active role in the development of the Colony during the decolonisation period through their community and economic contributions.

In a patriarchal society, despite this participation, women in the 1960s and 1970s were still restricted by their husbands and custom. As the 1968 Report to the Resident Commissioner observed, after marriage:

> wives are jealously guarded, custom forbids them to go out alone and should the husband be away from home for any long period, his wife is supervised by her mother-in-law or husband's relatives. Within the home, the roles are clearly demarcated and the woman cares for the children, cooks, weaves mats, makes string etc.[311]

---

[308] (1978, 10 May). Opening of Te Runga n aine at Abaiang. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 8
[309] Macdonald, (1982), op. cit., p 174
[310] (1968, 13 March). Increase of handicraft export. *Colony Information Notes*, p 3
[311] McCreary & Boardman, (1968), op. cit., p 74

Despite these restrictions, women were able to find modest empowerment within the domestic sphere through the knowledge and friendship that was gained by belonging to a club. The 1968 Report went on to highlight the role of women's clubs in elevating the sense of self-worth for members,

> we have the impression that women are beginning to find a new significance in life, although the number to whom this applies at any depth is probably few, the fact that over 3000 women are reported as members of Women's clubs is some indication of the influence at work. Women have shown themselves in other cultures as potent factors in social change once the customary restrictions have been reduced and we can see ways in which a growing sense of personal worth among women can be linked to social development in the Colony.[312]

Furthermore, the 1968 Report concluded, 'the evidence suggests women are achieving satisfaction from what is being offered (by the Homemaker Clubs)'.[313] While the extent of the impact of the women's clubs during this period is difficult to ascertain, in terms of the sense of belonging women felt to the Colony Group of Homemaker's Clubs. The ability of the Women's Interests Office to mobilise women for collective action is best illustrated by the successful election of Mrs Tekarei Russell in 1971.

By mobilising the women's interests movement, the formidable team of Mrs Roddy Cordon, Nei Katherine Tekanene and Mrs Tekarei Russell (first wave) and community workers (second wave) were able to engage women more actively in early political developments. Women were granted suffrage in 1967. Nei Katherine Tekanene was the first female representative to the House of Representatives in

---

[312] ibid., p 76
[313] ibid., p 24

1964. However, this position was by appointment by the Resident Commissioner. Encouraged by Mrs Cordon and staff of the Women's Interests Office , Mrs Tekarei Russell campaigned as the member for Urban Tarawa and Ocean Island (now Banaba) in the Legislative Council in 1971. When discussing this period in interviews, the common reaction of most women was to laugh and shake their heads, accompanied by, 'we didn't really know what we were doing, but we wanted Tekarei in government!'. One interview participant in recalling this event contributed the success of the campaign solely on the role of Mrs Cordon and the successful mobilisation of the women's clubs for votes:

> With our first (women's interest) coordinator (Mrs Cordon), she was from England, she was trying to campaign the women for election. That's how Mrs Tekarei Russell got it, because all the different groups were asked to put their votes for Tekarei. Maybe some didn't but most did. She (Tekarei) got many votes…[314]

The 1971 elections were the first time that Gilbertese and Ellice Island members were elected rather than being appointed by the Resident Commissioner. Claire Baiteke recalled 'this was the first time I-Kiribati (were) running the country and voting…before that (they were) just nominated'.[315] Describing her first experience of voting, one interview participant paints a vivid picture of the campaign:

> The transport was provided and on the truck we were told just vote for Tekarei because she is a woman. She (Tekarei) didn't do anything, she was just quiet. Mrs Cordon was doing all the campaigning. But we were very happy because she (Tekarei) got in not just as member, but as a minister.[316]

---

[314] Anon Note: Interviewee preferred anonymity.
[315] ibid.
[316] ibid.

This passage is typical of reflections of the election of Mrs Russell. In their retelling of events, women emphasised the point and the need to explain that Mrs Tekarei Russell remained quiet and shy during the campaigning process (culturally acceptable behaviour for a Gilbertese woman) whereas Mrs Cordon – the trusted i-*matang* – was the instigator. While at first examination this may give the impression that I-Kiribati women were a mere passive audience to this process, the line 'but we were very happy' implies that the women were active in their support of the election of Mrs Tekarei Russell.

By this stage, Mrs Tekarei Russell was already well-known for her active role in women's clubs. She was also well-respected in her position as a teacher at the Elaine Bernacchi School (EBS) government school for girls. She was the member for Urban Tarawa and Ocean Island (now Banaba) in the Legislative Council and later a member in the House of Assembly. Reported in the *Atoll Pioneer* in March 1974 was a brief biography of Mrs Russell as she successfully campaigned for the seat of Urban Tarawa in the General Elections. The article stated:

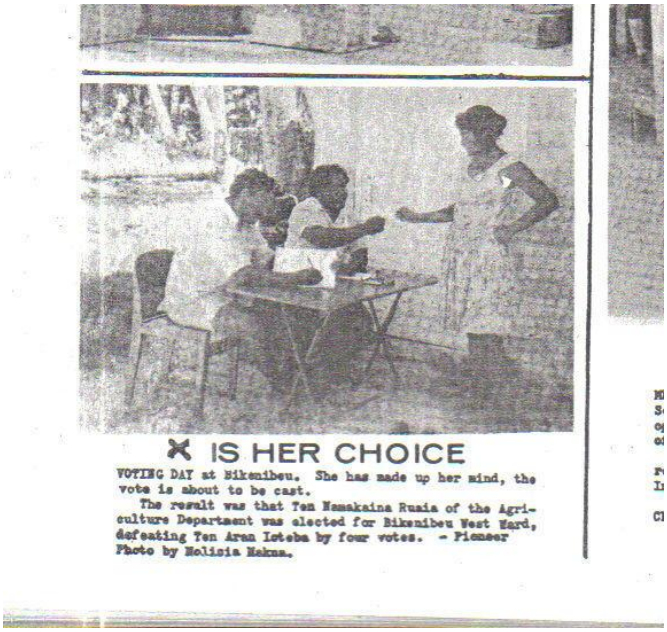
> Mrs Tekarei Russell, who started her early lifetime in Fiji, joined the Civil Service in 1959. She became a teacher at the Elaine Bernacchi School, Bikenbeu; having gained experiences in Fiji primary schools. She worked in the Elaine Bernacchi School for eight years; appointed a Women's Interests Office r in the Education Department in 1967 and was in this position until 1971 when she started her political career. She is the chairman of the Tungavalu Society, and the Girl Guides Commissioner in the Colony.

Reflecting back, one participant described the significance of this event on the women's movement, claiming that as a result of the election of Mrs Russell,

Gilbertese 'women now are given the opportunity to sit on boards and to be decision makers'.[317]

It is unclear whether the role of newsletters and radio broadcasts in educating women about electoral processes and government representation directly impacted women and their decision to vote for Mrs Tekarei Russell. It is also unclear if the exposure of women to and their familiarity with the process of democratic elections through their own elections of office bearers to clubs contributed to a heightened political consciousness among women. At the very least, the timing of Mrs Russell's election with the growing momentum of the women's interests movement is a correlation that is significant. By 1971 the Women's Interests Office had been operating for six years. The widespread popularity and membership of women's clubs as illustrated in the culmination of the first national Women's Conference in 1971 is a testament to the work of the first and second wave Gilbertese women.

[317] ibid.

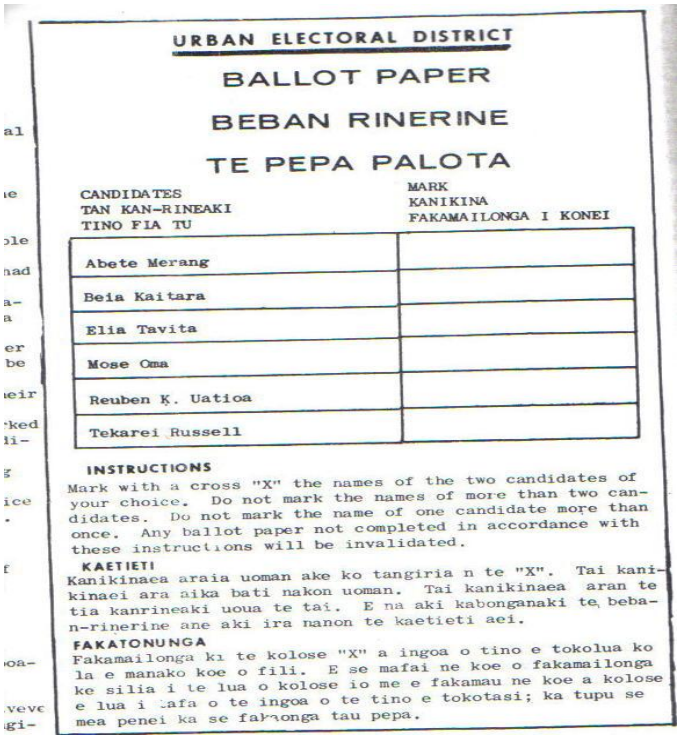


X IS HER CHOICE

VOTING DAY at Bikenibeu. She has made up her mind, the vote is about to be cast.

The result was that Ten Nemakaina Ruaia of the Agriculture Department was elected for Bikenibeu West Ward, defeating Ten Aran Loteba by four votes. - Pioneer Photo by Nelisia Nakua.

Image 11: Newspaper article on instructions for national elections[318]



URBAN ELECTORAL DISTRICT

BALLOT PAPER

BEBAN RINERINE

TE PEPA PALOTA

CANDIDATES TAN KAN-RINEAKI TINO FIA TU	MARK KANIKINA FAKAMAILONGA I KONEI
Abete Merang	
Beia Kaitara	
Elia Tavita	
Mose Oma	
Reuben K. Uatioa	
Tekarei Russell	

INSTRUCTIONS

Mark with a cross "X" the names of the two candidates of your choice. Do not mark the names of more than two candidates. Do not mark the name of one candidate more than once. Any ballot paper not completed in accordance with these instructions will be invalidated.

KAETIETI

Kanikinaea araia uoman ake ko tangiria n te "X". Tai kanikinaei ara aika bati nakon uoman. Tai kanikinaea aran te tia kanrineaki uoua te tai. E na aki kabonganaki te beban-rinerine ane aki ira nanon te kaetieti aei.

FAKATONUNGA

Fakamailonga ki te kolose "X" a ingoa o tino e tokolua ko la e manako koe o fili. E se mafai ne koe o fakamailonga ke silia i te lua o kolose io me e fakamau ne koe a kolose e lua i afa o te ingoa o te tino e tokotasi; ka tupu se mea penei ka se fakaonga tau pepa.

Image 12: Ballot Paper for national elections, 1974[319]

[318] (1973, 15 October) X is her choice. *Atoll Pioneer,* p 6.

[319] (1974, 28 March) Urban Electoral District Ballot Paper. Atoll Pioneer, p 2

On Mrs Cordon's departure in 1972, after working for seven years with the women of the Colony, Nei Katherine Tekanene took over as the Women's Interests Office r and author of the monthly newsletters. At this time, Mrs Tekarei Russell was a member of the Legislative Council, later to become the Minister of Health and Welfare. The two leading border-dweller women had replaced their European advisor. The informal educational content of newsletters at this time was largely replaced by local updates on what each of the community workers were doing and where they were touring. Stories were still included in the newsletters, and typically had a moral or Biblical theme. The focus of the newsletters was still on self-improvement and how best to be a good Christian, mother and wife as well as a contributing community member. The newsletters were circulated to all clubs (whether registered or not) up until 1977 when there was a paper shortage which restricted circulation to unregistered clubs. The newsletters continued until independence in 1979.

Concluding remarks

The momentum of the women's interests movement from 1965 onwards, supported by a reliable source of external funding as evidenced by Mrs Cordon's seven year appointment, encouraged the second wave of Gilbertese women, the first generation of community workers, to take a leading role in local community activity. The respect and prominence of the community worker during this time become increasingly acknowledged. However, this prominence was seen more and

more as aligned within Church spaces. Significantly virtually all villages during the 1960s and early 1970s were centred on the Church. This was particularly the case for village women whereby the female congregation was responsible for cleaning the Church grounds and raising funds to support the local catechist or pastor. As the community workers were chosen by their Church, despite the requirement to work for the government, many second wave women, as community workers, felt obliged to give back to their Church and congregation. In many instances, CETC graduates, after fulfilling the base requirement of government service, would often resign from their position and instead work for their respective Church. It is also important to note that once married or pregnant; women were required to resign from their government position (as required by Colonial policy). As a result, an increasing pool of well-educated young women was available for Church work. In contrast to the 1968 Report to the Resident Commissioner observations with respect to the problematic position of the educated in Gilbertese society,[320] the Church (both Protestant and Catholic) became a space in which increasing opportunities for women to 'do' women's work became safeguarded and in effect, legitimised within the community and family dynamics. This increasingly legitimised space within the Church gradually led to the undermining of the Homemaker Clubs, and ultimately, the border-dweller women in the first wave who instigated their establishment. In a sense, despite the best intentions, non-

[320] The 1968 Report stated, 'perhaps the most serious and immediate problem is the place or rather the lack of place, of the educated elite in the Indigenous social structure. Their effectiveness as change agents is probably reduced by what appears to us as their peripheral place in Indigenous life'. See J. R. McCreary & D.W. Boardman, (1968), op. cit., p 19.

denominational based clubs were destined to fail as the baton of progressing women's interests began to be taken up by the overlapping third wave of Gilbertese women that was emerging as a result of the growing numbers of educated women with social influence through their role in the Church or their husbands' position in the Church.

Chapter 6

'Our women can put one up but bring her back down' – women's political representation in the Colony

By the early 1970s, the government funded Women's Interests Office and community workers had successfully helped to facilitate the establishment of *Irekenrao* (Island Associations of Homemaker Clubs) on the majority of islands and atolls within the Colony. A process of electing representatives had been embedded within the formalised structure of women's organisation for the Gilbert Islands[321] and the notion of a national work program for women's interests was now a familiar concept for club members. By 1971, these Western introduced concepts and ideas were being embraced by women's clubs and were recognised as a legitimate and beneficial method in addressing the needs of women, their families as well as the community. By 1971, the women's interests movement had been strengthened by the first national women's conference of the Homemaker's Club network held in urban South Tarawa (albeit coordinated and dominated by expatriates). Representatives from the majority of *Irekenrao* had been elected by

[321] The formalised structure of women's organisation was implemented in both the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. Ellice Island women, as Colony women, were eligible to attend the CETC for training and also had the opportunity to return as community workers for the government. However, given the ratio of seven to one, Gilbertese to Ellice Islanders in the Colony, fewer Ellice Islander women were trained as community workers (of the 36 graduates from 1963-1979, four were Ellice Islanders. These women were Yanga Nemaia, Lifa Ualetenese, Liua Finekaso and Katalaina Malua) (See Nu'ufou P. (2002). Report on duty travel to Kiribati, Annex 3: List of CETC Graduates, unpublished report)). The historical development of Ellice Islander/Tuvaluan women's clubs post 1975, when the Ellice Islands separated from the Gilbert Islands Colony and became Tuvalu, is out of scope of this thesis. As discussed in the Chapter 3, due to limitations, this thesis is restricted to an analysis of Gilbertese developments.

their peers and travelled (in some cases, as unaccompanied women going against custom) from Outer Islands to attend. Women's exposure to processes which enabled them to witness a sense of belonging and as citizens was breaking down barriers of custom, isolation and insularity.

The Colonial administration's policy, as instigated by the Resident Commissioner VJ Andersen, was to create non-denominational village-based women's clubs through the Homemaker's movement in order to achieve, at the village-level, the 'essential developments that the territory requires'. [322] This had proved successful in the first decade of its implementation. With the depleting phosphate reserves affecting the Colony's finances, the third stage was for the Island Associations (*Irekenrao*) to form a national Federation which would take over the responsibility from the government-based Women's Interests Office for the overarching coordination and self-financing (through external funding sources and the payment of subscriptions) of the movement.[323] The successful mobilisation of the Homemaker's Club network during the campaign and election of Mrs Tekarei Russell suggested that the transition to the third stage of implementation of the Colonial administration's policy would be highly achievable. The growing regional (and international) consciousness of women's issues during the 1970s, and as a result, the greater availability of external funding opportunities also contributed to an increasingly confident outlook for the successful establishment of an independent framework for women's organisations, post-independence. Regionally, Pacific women in the

[322] Andersen, (1962), op. cit., p 2
[323] ibid.

mid-1970s were impacted by second wave feminist movements in the Western world as new notions of women's empowerment and development were being introduced. Female students at the recently established University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) and University of the South Pacific (USP) in Fiji were building the momentum of a regional consciousness of the wider women's movement.[324] The United Nations (UN) International Year of Women in 1975 saw women's issues prioritised. The publicity around the International Year of Women saw a steady stream of external funding committed to women's programs, activities and events, which would largely be sustained until the mid-1980s as a result of the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1984).[325] The strength of the UN agenda forced Pacific territories to consider women's issues with more scrutiny.[326] In October-November 1975, the First Pacific Women's Regional Conference was held in Suva, Fiji. This was the first occasion whereby Pacific women 'came specifically to talk about *themselves*'.[327] Regional humanitarian developments and external funding opportunities specifically targeted at women in the Pacific, in conjunction with the relatively successful implementation of the first and second stage of the women's Homemaker's Club network in the Colony positioned the 1970s as a promising decade for further advancements in the coordination of women's interests.

---

[324] Griffen, V. (1984). The Pacific Women's Movement. In R. Morgan (Ed.), *Sisterhood is global: The International Women's Movement anthology*. New York: Doubleday, pp 517-524

[325] Cockerton, (1999), op. cit., pp 305-314.

[326] Griffen, (1984), op. cit.

[327] ibid..

This chapter traces developments in the government-based women's interests movement during what can be considered its high point. Two key events are examined – the political career of the first Lady Minister, border-dweller Mrs Tekarei Russell, and the 1977 Women's Conference, the first conference to be organised for and by Gilbertese women . In analysing these two key events, the chapter considers the wider regional context of decolonisation during the last years of the British Colonial administration, as well as the influence of the growing consciousness of a wider Pacific women's movement.

Female Representation on the GEIC Advisory Council

Prior to the election of Mrs Tekarei Russell to the Legislative Council, fellow border-dweller Nei Katherine Tekanene (Bewebwentekai) was appointed by Resident Commissioner VJ Andersen as a Member of the Advisory Council from 1964 to 1967. This was the first instance of female representation in the Colonial government. During her time in Council, Nei Tekanene was a vocal advocate of women's rights. In a heated session of Council in 1965, the Colony Information Notes report:

> (Mrs Tekanene said that)…the people of the Colony must change the customs and traditions that prevent women from playing their part. She said that in the Colony women are at a disadvantage because they are not thought to be of any importance except to rear children and keep the house; because they are not educated equally with the men; because the starting of women's organisations is held up by jealousy …(and)…the shyness and modesty of the women. She said that there is much that the women of the Colony can do to help the Colony progress and improve and those women's organisations should be based in the villages and

> encouraged… But this can only be done if the women can take their places beside the men and play their full part in the life of the Colony.[328]

In identifying customs and traditions that adversely impacted the opportunities for women, Mrs Tekanene targeted her criticism towards women. She believed it was women who were hindering progress as a result of 'petty jealousies among … themselves that have held up the formation of women's organisations, and that there can be no real progress in this field until these jealousies are overcome'.[329] As proceeedings of the Advisory Council for 1965 reveal, Nei Tekanene was critical of policies, plans or budgets that did not take into account concerns affecting women.[330] The lack of funding committed to family planning education as well as towards basic medical supplies in local dispensaries are two key examples. In venting her frustration over the low priority given to these, Nei Katherine Tekanene is reported as stating:

> there was no money in the estimates for family planning. Nothing could be done to solve the problems of too many people without money. She said that too much money is spent on things that are not essential while other things like dispensaries in the islands are ignored.[331]

Despite the forcefulness of these statements, the impact of Nei Tekanene's vocalness in favour of women's progression is difficult to ascertain. As a 'Gilbertese but not a real Gilbertese', other women found Nei Tekanene's behaviour problematic. Interviews reveal women, while perhaps admiring her tenacity, did not view Nei Tekanene as being like them or necessarily representing their views. This was a common observation across the region, as Siwatibau, writing in 1985,

---

[328] (1965). Community welfare from a woman's point of view. *Colony Information Notes*, *47*, p 4
[329] (1965). Mrs Tekanene blames the women*., Colony Information Notes*, *49*, p 3
[330] (1965). Family planning. *Colony Information Notes*, *46*, p 3
[331] ibid.

observed, 'elite women, who are usually vocal, are often out of touch with the majority of women'.[332] On the other hand, expatriates were impressed with her ability to speak up when in an audience of men. Mrs Roddy Cordon, in her memoirs described Nei Katherine and this milestone in the following passage:

> Katherine Tekanene, the one women member of the House of Representatives. Katherine was one of the few well-educated women in the Colony, having been to school in Fiji, and the quickest typist in the Education Department. She was also never at a loss for words, and not afraid to speak her mind – a useful trait for the one woman in a legislative body of men! In fact, Katherine was the prime mover in women's emancipation.[333]

Reflecting on this period of her life, Nei Tekanene recalls, 'To me personally I felt it was a great a privilege for at last the people have come to realise that the women have a place in society, and have now the chance to voice their opinion alongside men'.[334] In an interview with the *Atoll Pioneer*, Nei Tekanene stated, 'I enjoyed those long sessions in the Council… I remembered vividly when the Workmen's Compensation Bill came up for the first time and when I strongly opposed because there was no mention of women's compensation-only the men. So I put up my first motion, but unfortunately I lost.'[335] Coinciding with the United Nations International Year of Women in 1975, *Atoll Pioneer* begin a regular 'Women's Page'. A regular feature of the 'Women's Page' were biographies of successful women of the Colony. Kaingateiti Awira (one of the first female journalists for the *Atoll Pioneer*) wrote of Katherine Tekanene:

---

[332] Siwatibau, S. (1985). Women's access to aid sponsored training in the South Pacific. In Cole, R. V., et. al., (1985) *Women in development of the South Pacific: Barriers and Opportunities.* (pp 88-104) Canberra: Development Studies, The Australian National University, p 98

[333] Cordon, (1996), op. cit., pp 43-4

[334] Awira, (1975), op. cit., p 6

[335] ibid.

> This week we feature Mrs Katherine Tekanene, another female figure who has earned a permanent name in the civil service. Like Mrs Tekarei Russel, who recently emerged to what was once a man's position in the GEIC political profession, Mrs Tekanene only (three) years back was appointed Women's Interests Office r and became the first local woman ever to achieve such a position in the service.[336]

Nei Tekanene's political career ended in 1967. At her departure from the Advisory Council, she returned to taking on an active role in the Women's Interests Office with Mrs Cordon and Mrs Tekarei Russell. Despite the mixed reactions from her fellow women and male counterparts, Nei Tekanene's appointment to the Advisory Council and her outspokeness laid the foundation for further women's advancement in the public and political sphere.

The First Lady Minister

The election of Mrs Russell was considered a great success of the women's interest's movement. It was seen as a turning point in that there was a growing acknowledgement among women of the potential for women to transition from the private to the public sphere. Custom did not permit women to play a formal role in decision-making processes in traditional Gilbertese society; however in spite of this, a woman was successful in the first Colony election. The Homemakers' Club network had successfully mobilised its members at a national level in its campaign to elect Mrs Russell. In recalling this event, women interviewed expressed a strong sense of collective achievement. Rather than viewing the event as an individual

[336] ibid.

accomplishment, women believed it to be a direct outcome of their success as the Colony Group of Homemakers. In describing the event, women often used the phrase, 'we were successful' rather than 'Mrs Tekarei Russell was successful'.[337] During her time in government, Mrs Russell expressed strong views on development, urbanisation, decentralisation, local governance and education, and voiced concern over the rising cost of living, lack of resources committed to the Outer Islands, custody, divorce, discrimination and alcohol abuse.

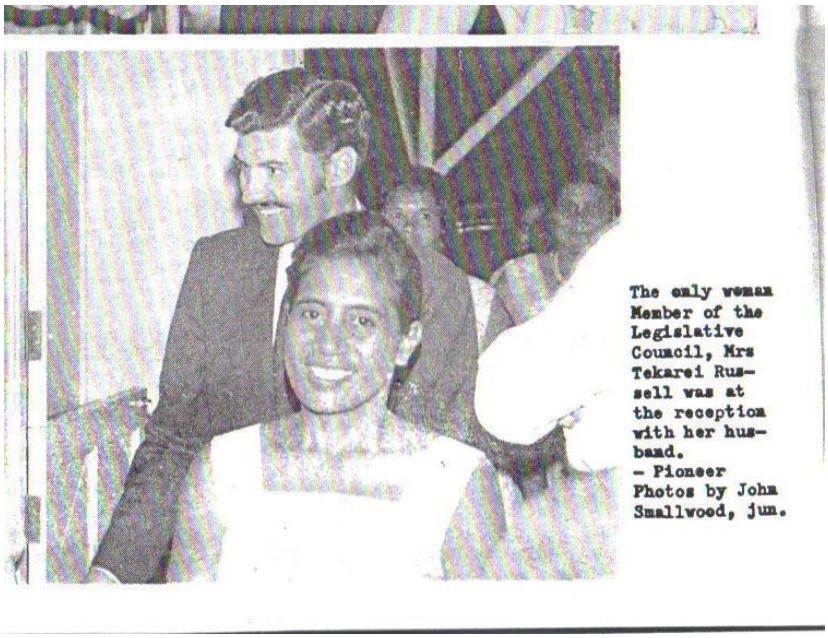


Image 13: Lady Minister Mrs Tekarei Russell in the *Atoll Pioneer*, 1976[338]

In a period of dramatic social and economic changes in the Colony, Mrs Russell, as the only Lady Minister, provided a woman's perspective to issues raised in the Legislative Council. In 1972, Mrs Russell criticised the draft 1973-1976 Development Plan and urged the Legislative Council to consider the impact of

[337] Baiteke, I. (personal communication, May 22, 2007)
[338](1976, 26 July) *Atoll Pioneer*, p 105

development on families. Speaking on the subject 'Children and the Homes – our future investment', in the context of the Development Plan, Mrs Russell stated, 'Could it really be said that by carrying out these projects we were really improving? Had we kept homes, families and children in mind?'.[339] In the same session, she raised concerns over the growing urban drift to South Tarawa in search of employment. As a result of urbanisation, she stated 'more and more men were leaving their families to seek employment in South Tarawa, causing a sex imbalance in the Outer Islands'.[340] Mrs Russell, while being the member for urban South Tarawa, was a supporter of decentralisation and backed moves (albeit unsuccessfully) for greater resources to be invested in Outer Islands. She pointed out that Members were continually 'asked to get improvements for the Outer Islands' and that 'they (Outer Island constituents) complained that seven-eighths of the cake always went to Tarawa'.[341]

Image 14: Members of the House of Assembly, 1975[342]

[339] (1972, 30 November). Legislative Council Meeting, Day-By-Day. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 5
[340] ibid.
[341] ibid., 12
[342] (1975, 11 September). Members of House of Assembly, *Atoll Pioneer*, p 11

Mrs Russell advocated for greater employment opportunities on Outer Islands and for government to encourage and seek greater markets for handicrafts. In response to the release of the 1973-1976 Development Plan, Mrs Russell urged government to more closely consider the impacts of development and urbanisation on society by cautioning, 'It (is) all very well to develop at a fast rate but the effect on families should be constantly borne in mind'.[343] Mrs Russell actively pursued policies that, she believed, would improve the lives of women and families, particularly on Outer Islands, and was a strong critic of policies that failed to do so.

At a procedural level, Mrs Russell called for greater accountability within the Legislative Council. In November 1972 during the second meeting for the second session of the Legislative Council she put forward a motion for 'Government (to) adopt a procedure …whereby Members (of the Executive Council) report back to the Council on progress made and actions taken on approved motions of the preceding meeting'.[344] While the motion came against 'stiff' opposition and was not supported, in the context of very early political developments that very few in the Colony by this time had been exposed to, it demonstrates Mrs Russell's ability to challenge and question the way in which government was run and to offer alternatives to make it more effective. Macdonald noted, when referring to the new Legislative Council for 1971, 'what the new members lacked in experience, however, they made up in education and administrative experience.'[345] Mrs Russell put forward the motion so that Members would be accountable for actions against

[343] (1972, 30 November). Legislative Council Meeting, Day-By-Day. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 5
[344] ibid., p 12
[345] Macdonald, (1982), op. cit., p 239

them and to also ensure all Members had an opportunity to respond. Her motion was dismissed citing it would be time-consuming, cause unnecessary additional paperwork and that all Members should utilise question time to address any outstanding issues. In a male-dominated environment where women were traditionally seen and not heard, this article reveals Mrs Russell's frustration. As reported in the *Atoll Pioneer,* after the motion had been dismissed, Mrs Russell thanked Members for their advice; she would now ask more questions, 'My attitude now will be, shout, shout as much as you can'.[346]

Mrs Russell was an advocate for greater representation and political participation at the village level. By the 1970s, the Colonial administration had established Island Councils. The institution of the Island Council was a Western concept that was introduced to ensure all villages of the island were represented at a core body. The Island Councils were established to help ease the transition to independence at the island level as well as to introduce the concept of representative government. The introduction of Island Councils, or local government, was a central plank of the decolonisation process and seen as the first step in democratising Pacific societies towards Western forms of representative government. This occurred in all British colonies, and by the 1960s and 1970s was well underway in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Fiji. In the Gilberts, this development had to accommodate the existing, powerful traditional decision-making mechanism - the *maneaba.* The *maneaba* system, was based on an oligarchy system, whereby each family within a

[346] (1972, 30 November). Legislative Council Meeting, Day-By-Day. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 12

village was represented in the *maneaba* (meeting house) by the *unimwane* (old men) of the family. The Island Councils tended to operate 'in a way that is neither that envisaged by the architects of its constitution nor that of tradition, but a unique compromise between the demands of each'.[347] Acknowledging this and in her own attempt to merge the two, Mrs Russell spoke on the topic of "Where does the *maneaba* system fit in with the present system of Government?". While maintaining the success of the system past and present, Mrs Tekarei Russell suggested revisions, stating she felt that young people and women were ignored. Her speech to the Legislative Council was reported in the *Atoll Pioneer*. She was quoted as saying:

> the rule of the maneaba extended only as far as the village area. In many cases the people looked up to the old for security. The young men and women did respect the decision of the old men and wherever possible they saw to it that those decisions were carried out. In some instances, said Mrs Russell, the young men might be given freedom to decide on any particular project for the village, but as custom required, they must refer to the old men. Formal meetings in the maneaba followed rigid procedures and formalities, and only speakers were able to talk; there was one who must talk first, and there was a person to answer, and so on. There was a person to inform the people of a meeting, or tell them of the decisions of the maneaba. Women and very young people were not allowed to speak during meetings. In some cases they had no say in village affairs unless a husband asked for his wife's view before he attended the maneaba. There were times, she said, when the old men left the matter for a women's organisation to decide, or young men how best to carry out a programme. The system had worked successfully in the past and if compared with the present system it could be argued that the maneaba system could be adapted to 'work' under the present system of government at village level.[348]

The report of proceedings continued:

---

[347] Sewell, B. (1976). *Butaritari report: Rural socio-economic survey of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands.* Wellington, New Zealand: Victoria University of Wellington.
[348] (1972, 7 December). A busy week in the Legislative Council. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 4

> For what was lacking in the present system, said Mrs Russell, was an active lead at the village level, which was closer to the individual, but island councils could administer affairs as a whole. But unless village representatives were supported by the villagers as individuals not much could be achieved.[349]

Mrs Russell advocated for change and action that would 'flow from the top down to the village'.[350] She was convinced that with an active village committee the ideas would ultimately come from the village up to the council. It would 'encourage people to think, and to do, for themselves, rather than wait for the council to think and decide for the villagers'.[351] The same issue of the Atoll Pioneer reported on Mrs Russell's work as Member for South Tarawa where:

> she had encountered many instances when she had seen the need for villagers to play a more active part in the Government. They were, in fact..(achieving this) …by bringing up their grievances but she would also give recommendation as to how they wanted the difficulties to be solved …She would, therefore, like to see village committees formed, if people liked the idea, to help their council members in work for the village; to give him ideas; and help him to put council decisions into effect.[352]

She proposed establishing village committees that would inform their needs to the Island Council representative and in turn, help implement Island Council decisions. Her proposal of representatives of the village committee included a new composition of members that represented a wider spectrum of the community, inclusive of women and young people. Her proposal was, 'Council Members, six old men; or if adapted, council member for the ward as chairman; old men of the

[349] ibid.
[350] ibid.
[351] ibid.
[352] ibid.

maneaba, perhaps four; women's organisations, two; Churches, one; youth, one'.[353] The duties of her proposed new committees:

> would be to collect village views, to follow up any project island council might require, to initiate any useful programme which could be beneficial to the village, and also to make recommendations about how best to tackle any particular problem.[354]

Mrs Russell believed that the new committee system, if adopted:

> would lead to more participation of the village, and, furthermore, she hoped, the villagers would be encouraged to use more initiative. The maneaba system was close to, and popular with, the villagers, who were the key figures of the nation. "Bring Government to the village through the maneaba".[355]

While her concept was supported by some, the motion was not passed. However, this public display of policy and opinion by a woman in parliament is significant in revealing two key points. Firstly, it demonstrates Mrs Russell ability to critically engage in the political process and offer alternative structures at local government level that were inclusive of women's participation and representation. Secondly, her proposal is an example of an acknowledgement and respect for traditional political structures (the *maneaba* system) but also a growing awareness and recognition of change (Island Councils) and the need to adapt and to develop more robust systems that would negotiate tradition within processes towards decolonisation.

---

[353] ibid., p 5
[354] ibid.
[355] ibid.

As an advocate of decentralisation, Mrs Russell was successful in convincing the Legislative Council to pass a motion to set up a 'Committee to examine decentralisation of Government services',[356] with her as the Chair. She was also instrumental in arguing for the establishment of a 'Committee to study the report of the Director of Audit for the year 1971'. [357] She also put a motion to pass a Custody of Children Bill in December 1973. While unsuccessful, Mrs Russell challenged her male counterparts to consider issues facing women and families and to acknowledge the changing social environment of the 1970s. In her attempts to gain support for her Bill, Mrs Tekarei Russell cited that she had received grievances from her constituents and the Bill was aimed at addressing these issues. She said there had been, 'many complaints from mothers that when a couple divorced or separated, they were prevented from having custody of their children, or even being allowed to see them'. [358] While custom dictated that children should remain with their fathers, Mrs Russell raised concerns with this custom and proposed a more equitable approach that considered the rights of the mother. This approach applied introduced Western institutions (i.e.: the magistrates court) as a means to resolve family-based conflict:

> The law she was proposing should be fair; it should favour neither the mother nor the father. It would mean that if either the mother or father had any complaint about who should have custody of the children then the complaint could be brought before the court. It would be for the court to decide with whom the children should live. It if decided that one parent should have full custody of the children, permission should be given for the other parent to see the children whenever he or she wished. [359]

---

[356] (1972, 14 December). Three Select Committees set up. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 1
[357] ibid.
[358] (1973, 6 December). Bill to aid children of broken homes. *Atoll Pioneer,* p 8
[359] ibid.

Mrs Russell stressed the importance of avoiding divorce in the first instance, 'attempts should be made to persuade couple not to get separated or divorced',[360] and it was accepted in the Legislative Council that in some cases divorce was unavoidable. The Member for Internal Affairs conceded 'the world we grew up in, was not the world that our children grow up in today'. [361] In those cases, as the Member for Internal Affairs stated in support of Mrs Russell's Bill, 'the welfare of children was a matter which should be of paramount importance to us all'. [362]

The discussion of the Legislative Council continued and Members reflected on the changes experienced in the islands during the 1970s, as one Member noted 'the stability of our society in the past did not require laws to make us look after our children, but it was an unfortunate fact of life that more and more marriages broke up….and many children did not have the legal protection of a formal marriage'.[363] The Minister for Internal Affairs 'thanked Mrs Russell for bringing this Private Members Bill; he believed personally that the Bill was needed and strongly urged the Members of Council to give it their support'. [364] Tuvaluan, Mr Sione Tui Kleis (Nui) agreed, and the *Atoll Pioneer* reported:

> He was glad to see the honourable lady Member was trying to improve on the local customs which did not fit the needs of our time. This particular local custom was that when two partners separated, the father looked after the children, because it was thought that the father could better provide for the livelihood for the children… (however)..by adopting new customs, things would be better'. [365]

---

[360] ibid.
[361] ibid.
[362] ibid.
[363] ibid.
[364] ibid.
[365] ibid., p 9

Mr Tito Teburoro (Tabiteuea North) acknowledged 'customs were not always good and from time to time they should be corrected' and that as the Colony experienced changes and development, 'we (the people) needed new customs, a new way of life'.[366] However, despite support from her male counterparts, the issue of negotiating custom and adopting new customs proved problematic for the majority of the Members of the Legislative Council. The majority disagreed and said the Bill was going against custom and were concerned that 'to the old men at home it would appear that we were trying to be too clever'.[367] Others did not believe that custody of children should be a decision of the magistrate, but rather should remain a private matter to be settled within the family.

Mirroring the developments in the women's interests movement and its organisation through women's clubs, Mrs Russell but forth a strategy for the training of youth workers to be supported by government to strengthen youth organisations. The motion, despite some contest, was passed.[368] Mrs Russell also discussed the issue of government taking over from the mission schools, and raised health concerns over dengue fever and asked the government what it had done about eradicating mosquitoes.[369] She also held strong views on social issues such as divorce and alcoholism.[370]

---

[366] ibid.
[367] ibid.
[368] (1975, 29 May). The forgotten ones have problems. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 4
[369] (1975, 29 May). Dengue fever. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 6
[370] (1975, 29 May). News on private practitioners. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 3

In 1975, to coincide with the United Nations Year of Women, Mrs Russell requested her fellow member to 'actively involve women in the development of the Colony at all levels'. Her request was passed. In terms of access to education, she voiced concern over the discrepancy in the cost of education for Gilbertese in comparison to *i-matang* children of expatriate British officials. Mrs Russell raised the issue of inequity of school fees at the Rurubao School when the decision in 1975 was made to increase school fees for local children 'from $24 to $44 per children per term while the fees paid for expatriates Government Officers' children attending the same school are reimbursable by the British Government'.[371] She went on to argue that 'the gap between the fees in secondary schools and Rurubao is big - this seems to discourage local parents to send their children to Rurubao and in turn encourages discrimination'.[372] In response, the Minister of Education, Training and Culture, stated 'the Rurubao School was set up more or less as a Private School mainly for the educational needs of expatriate children and local parents must be prepared to meet the rest of fees after $60 rebate per term by Government'.[373] While her concerns were not addressed, the discussion highlights Mrs Russell's concerted efforts in raising issues that affected women and children. It also reveals that, despite strong opposition to change within the Legislative Council, Mrs Russell continued to advocate for changes that would benefit women and their families. Mrs Russell also pushed for safer road rules and tougher penalties for those who were caught speeding. The issue of road safety was first raised in February 1973 by

[371] (1975, 29 May). Kill two birds at one throw. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 17
[372] ibid.
[373] ibid.

women's clubs in Betio.[374] Mrs Russell took on board the concerns of clubs and in 1975 requested better road safety and driver education.[375] It is obvious from an analysis of newspaper articles and reports that Mrs Russell was a voice for women and their grievances within the government. In 1975, to coincide with the United Nations Year of Women, Mrs Russell requested to her fellow member to 'actively involve women in the development of the Colony at all levels'.[376] Her request was passed.

After serving two terms, Mrs Russell campaigned again in the national elections of 1977 for the seat of Urban Tarawa. Out of the 158 nominations throughout the Gilbert Islands constituents, Mrs Russell was the only female. As there was no clear majority, the three seats for Urban Tarawa were re-contested. Unfortunately for Mrs Russell, she was unable to retain her seat. In the Governor's address to the new House of Assembly after the elections of 1977 the Governor John Smith said to the new and re-elected members:

> You represent not only the many islands which make up our country but a wide range of experience and talent. There are among you those who can speak on behalf the elders and those who can speak on behalf of youth. I have but one regret, there is no lady minister.[377]

Successive British administrators, from Resident Commissioner VJ Andersen to Governor John Smith, had supported and promoted the inclusion of women in national decision-making. However, despite the backing of expatriates, Mrs Russell

---

[374] (1973, 15 February) Pioneer comment: Safety on the roads – who cares? *Atoll Pioneer*, p 4
[375] (1975, 22 May). CM welcomes new speaker *Atoll Pioneer*, p 6
[376] (1975, 22 May). Political supplement: Report of the Legislative Council. *Atoll Pioneer,* p 29
[377] (1978, 24 February). Governor's address. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 4

had failed to maintain the support of the women and consistency. As one interview participant explained:

> …she (Tekarei) should have been in for a long time but because of misunderstanding of women…well, our women don't understand…Being a minister you belong to cabinet, you might say yes but they (Cabinet) say no…but they (the women) don't see all the good, positive work she (Tekarei) had been doing for the name of Kiribati and for women as well. By 1977 she (Tekarei) had finished (her time in office). Our women can put one up but bring her back down.[378]

The early 1970s had witnessed the mobilisation of the women's interests movement to bring Mrs Russell to power. By the late 1970s, the women's interests movement was beginning to fracture. As the Catholic and Protestant Church underwent a process of indigenisation, Church-based women's clubs were strengthening. With the failure of Mrs Russell to gain re-election, it was evident that one organisational structure could not represent the needs of all of the women in the Colony. Despite her best efforts to be an advocate for change in women's betterment, Mrs Russell was no longer seen as being a representative of all of the women of the Colony.

Mrs Russell's political career coincided with other developments within the Colony. In 1975, the *Atoll Pioneer's* weekly 'Women's Page' included an article on a personality or an event relating to women's development either regionally or locally. Of interest in terms of an analysis of changing customs, was an article on Miss Halliday, first expatriate woman to hold the position of principal of the Tarawa Teacher's College. On her departure from the Colony in 1975, she replaced by local

[378] Baiteke, I. (personal communication, May 22, 2007)

woman Mrs Kaennang who had trained overseas. In reflecting on Miss Halliday's time as principalal, the *Atoll Pioneer* interviewed former students of the College. The responses reveal the changing attitudes towards women's position within the public sphere:

> A male student in the College said, "In the beginning I could not believe that a lady could take up such a job. Not only do I feel bewildered but had all sorts of ideas and uncertainties at the time ….My Gilbertese customs about the (incapability) of a woman made my doubts (grow) stronger and stronger but after weeks of observing our Lady Principal, all these doubts and uncertainties vanished completely. [379]

The female perspective was also offered:

> A girl student said, 'like all other girls, there was nothing I felt uncertain about Miss Halliday. I only feel proud for this because it (gave me) an example to our Government that women could also do or hold such positions.[380]

The following fortnight, the Women's Page did an article on Dr Terenganuea Taaram, the first female doctor in the Colony.[381] Dr Taaram was educated at the Betio Government Primary School and later at the EBS. After winning a scholarship to study medicine at the Fiji School of Medicine in Tamavua, Dr Taaram returned to the Colony to practice medicine in the Betio Hospital. When asked what is was like to be the first lady doctor in the Colony, she described, 'It's like a challenge to me, as I have to live like a man and be treated like one, but the most important thing for me is to try and work my way through, so that I may be of great help to my people'.[382]

---

[379] (1975, 3 July). Women's page: The feeling that she had. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 9
[380] ibid.
[381] (1975, 24 July). Women's page: What it is like to be first. *Atoll Pioneer*, p 10
[382] ibid.

Despite having no 'lady Minister' to represent women's issues and provide a female perspective in government, the 1970s saw a gradual change in how men viewed women and how women viewed themselves. Old customs that regarded women as secondary to men were slowly being challenged as more and more women held positions of employment within the public realm. The changing social and economic environment introduced new customs that superseded the old. Regionally, the GEIC was also impacted by regional developments influenced by second wave feminism. This culminated in the 1975 International Year of Women.

1975 United Nations International Year of Women

The concept of women's rights and feminism were first discussed regionally in the Pacific in 1975. To coincide with the United Nations Year of Women and preparations for the future self-government of many Pacific nations (predominantly Papua New Guinea), the first Pacific Women's conference was held in Suva, Fiji from the 27 October to 2 November 1975. The idea to hold the conference was raised during a meeting of the Young Women's Christian Association's Public Affairs Committee in Papua New Guinea in 1974. From these humble beginnings, a planning committee was established with the role of organising the conference and mobilising women, students and women's groups throughout the region. The aim of the conference, as described by organising secretary, Claire Slatter, was to 'work on the situation of women in the Pacific, as defined by ourselves, and that we

discuss the issues that concerned us and which were relevant to the Pacific'.[383] Emphasis was placed on the role and status of women, and how institutions in Pacific societies, such as the family, traditional culture, religion, education, the media, law and politics 'mould us (Pacific women), defining our role'.[384] The conference invited women to acknowledge the power of these institutions in dictating women's lives and discuss how women could redefine their positions by challenging these institutions. Underlying all discussions was the goal for women 'to develop their full potential'[385] as individuals as well as members of their community 'for the betterment of everybody'.[386]

In the organisation leading up to the conference, letters were circulated to all Pacific territories. In the GEIC, these letters were received by Mrs Russell in her position as Minster for Health and Welfare. The letters were also printed in the Colony's newspaper, the *Atoll Pioneer*. Two delegates from the GEIC were invited to attend the regional Pacific conference to be held in Suva, Fiji. It was agreed that community worker Kairabu Kamoriki and Women's Interests Officer, Katherine Tekanene would represent the Colony. It was a sign how far the mobilisation of women in Kiribati had created an atmosphere of acknowledgement and reception of changing roles, that the two women were quickly selected and dispatched to Suva.

---

[383] Slatter, C. (1976). Forward. In *Women speak out! A report of the Pacific Women's Conference. October 27 – November 2, 1975,* p iii
[384] ibid., iii-iv
[385] ibid., iii
[386] Aubry, T. (1979.) *Women speak out! A report of the Pacific Women's Conference, October 27 – November 2, 1975,* p 132

In promoting the conference, Vanessa Griffin wrote of the opportunities the International Women's Year opened up for Pacific women. She stated:

> The United Nations has declared 1975 International Women's Year. But whether it will bring about far-reaching changes is another matter. Nevertheless, it is a good opportunity for people and governments to face the issue and attempt to bring about some change… The women of the Pacific are not going to let this opportunity slip by uneventfully. A South Pacific Regional Women's Conference will be held at the end of the year, at which women from all over the region will talk about themselves and what they see as the main issues and problems concerning them.[387]

Griffin went on to describe the main issues the Conference aimed to address:

> One of the first areas where change is needed is in the attitudes to women held by society, that is, the attitudes of men to women, and the attitudes women have about themselves. In the Pacific, this is a particularly sensitive area, since many traditional values have been lost or threatened by change. The women's question is often labelled as one of these threatening changes, and passed off as 'Women's Lib'. The South Pacific Regional Women's Conference will be a chance for women throughout the Pacific to get together to discuss the issues which they feel are relevant to their situation in the Pacific, and decide the areas in which they feel change is most needed. It certainly will be a change for women from different areas to meet and share their ideas and experiences.[388]

Over 35 delegates were invited to attend from Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, the Cooks, Gilberts, New Hebrides, New Caledonia, the Solomons, Papua New Guinea and Micronesia as well as Aboriginal and Maori women from Australia and New Zealand. The conference was funded predominantly by the World YWCA as well as other organisations and agencies. In the build-up to the conference, Griffin wrote:

> Letters and information have been sent to individuals and organisations and so far the response has been good. To step up planning activities and raise issues concerning women, a monthly publication, Women Speak Out, is

---

[387] Griffen, V. (1975, July). Pacific women's chance. *Pacific Islands Monthly*, p.8
[388] ibid.

> being issued. Efforts are being made to use the radio, press and the Peace Satellite at USP to reach women in the Pacific with information about the conference and International Women's Year. [389]

Despite the momentum and progress in arranging the conference, Griffin was critical of the engagement and commitment of governments. She wrote:

> As far as governments in the Pacific are concerned, the response has been more in token words that in substantial financial support or a genuine desire to improve the position of women in Pacific societies. The Papua New Guinea Government has given $68,000 for International Women's Year activities in that country. But it is the only one to do so. It also has the improvement of the position of women as part of its Eight Point Plan. Sometimes that is forgotten but at least it is there.[390]

As the conference was held during the period of decolonisation regionally in the Pacific, discussions often led to the future of women's roles within their newly independent states. Highlighting this period of change, Jamaican guest speaker, Dr Lucille Mair, encouraged women to consider the conference as a time to share in the 'process of re-discovering or re-defining our womanhood, at the same time we are also discovering and defining our nationhood'.[391] Participants were introduced to the concept of women as 'doubly challenged' as 'both woman and citizen' and as Dr Mair argued, 'it is no coincidence that in so many countries, men and women are seeking for the full release of the potential of women at the same time they are seeking for the full release of nations'.[392] Women were encouraged to invoke a 're-

[389] ibid.
[390] ibid.
[391] Mair, (1976) *Women speak out! A report of the Pacific Women's Conference. October 27 – November 2, 1975, p* 111
[392] ibid., p 115

definition of self'[393] and to see themselves as key players in nation-building in partnership with men.

It was during this conference that, for the first time, Pacific women on a regional level were invited and encouraged to develop a uniquely Pacific women's perspective to their lives, experiences and future. While the term 'feminism' was not directly referred to during conference discussions, the influence of international developments of second-wave feminism is obvious. However, despite the influence of feminism in the Pacific as early as the 1975 Women's Conference, many Pacific women continue to react against being labeled a 'feminist'. The first Pacific Women's Conference in 1975, the Women's Liberation movement was portrayed as a white women's movement and therefore not relevant to the lives of Pacific women. One of the most controversial issues raised and a statement which was highly contested was the belief that feminism was a struggle against discrimination, yet many Pacific women asserted that they were not discriminated against in their own cultures rather their traditions secured power bases for women.[394]

The outcomes of the conference included the establishment of a Pacific Women's Resource Centre in Fiji in May 1976. The role of Centre was to act as morale building centre for women and provide resources for their education and training. The impact on Kiribati women is difficult to quantify and is perhaps best indicated by a review of the comments made by the delegates themselves. Speaking on the

[393] Aubry, (1976), op. cit., p 127
[394] Griffen, (1989), op. cit., pp 19-22

role of the family and traditional culture, Kairabu Kamoriki described the burdens placed on women in Kiribati as:

> carrying all the family's worries. She must look after the whole family. She sees that there is enough food to eat, she does the washing, and other housework, and she even goes out fishing or out to the bush.[395]

In contrast, Kairabu Kamoriki describes, '[t]he father's duty is to see that his family is safe and to fish, cut copra etc'.[396] Kairabu Kamoriki spoke on the changes to traditional views of women in the Kiribati. She is quoted as saying:

> Before there was no place for women to go and talk. They used to just listen to the men talking. The women in olden days were not very important. They were told to just be happy, eat, and enjoy what they have. Women were not allowed to talk, but nowadays we know that most of the women in the Gilberts go to school and there are members of the House, members of Councils, and in government departments some of our women are working there. Now the government is trying to help our women by breaking down some of the culture. There is the Health and Welfare section which is divided into the Family Planning, Health Education, and Women's Clubs – all of which deal with culture and family traditions.[397]

Katherine Tekanene, representing the Women's Interests Office, spoke on communication difficulties experienced by the office and the importance of radio in their work,

> We are an atoll island and we're scattered over thousands of miles. We have just nothing but few lands and a lot of sea. We've got 16 islands in the Gilberts and 8 in the Ellice Islands. You can imagine how people rely on the radio and this is how we, in the Women's Interests Office , work with the women in the Outer Islands.

For the reasons of remoteness and isolation, Katherine continued:

---

[395] Kamoriki, K. (1976) *Women speak out! A report of the Pacific Women's Conference. October 27 – November 2, 1975,*
[396] ibid.
[397] ibid.

> We have to get through to them. We have to speak in Gilbertese, Ellice, and very little English and that's why I think if you are having difficulty trying to put through your methods to the women because of the communication difficulty through shipping, I think the best way you have to work with is through the radio. More or less all the people now throughout the islands depend mostly on radio for their messages from overseas and elsewhere, even through telegrams. If the telegrams breakdown on the wireless, we get our messages through the radio. It is one of the strongest things that people in the Pacific are very grateful to have - this sort of communication with the people of the Outer Islands. People in the towns who have many things to socialise themselves with, forget that the people in the Outer Islands almost live with the radio. This is their only way of entertainment and they listen very intently and they make very critical assessments from there. You'd be surprised the people who make the talk in the Parliament, the House of Assembly, don't contribute to anything that's going on, even in the newspaper. But it's the people in the Outer Islands who make criticisms and send them back even if its two or three months late, but their points still come through, and this is through the radio.

Katherine concluded by saying:

> And I wish to say how much we in the Gilbert and Ellice depend mainly through our work to get any message through to the women or to the people of the rural area-our main communication is the radio.[398]

Both comments reveal the social and economic changes experienced in the Colony during the 1970s. While Kairabu Kamoriki highlights the changes in attitudes to custom, Katherine Tekanene discusses differences between urban South Tarawa and life in the Outer Islands. She identified radio as the key factor in the involvement of remote atoll communities in the day to day affairs of the Colony as it headed towards independence. Furthermore, Katherine Tekanene reveals the growing political consciousness and engagement of Outer Islanders.

---

[398] Tekanene, K. (1976). *In Women speak out! A report of the Pacific Women's Conference. October 27 – November 2, 1975*, pp. 50-51

The late 1970s, as a result of the UN International Decade for Women, saw external funding opportunities for women's development increase significantly. In addition, the SPC remained committed to ongoing training of women's interests and community workers. A typical example of this the Sub-Regional Workshop on 'Future Trends in the Development of Women's Programmes in the South Pacific Region', held in 1975. Separate from the regional women's conference, this workshop offered a refresher run by the SPC. In May 1975, the Australian Freedom-From-Hunger Campaign agreed to fund the holding of a two-week sub-regional workshop which would deal both with future training needs in the Pacific women's program and the refresher course requirements of former CETC trainees actively engaged in community development work. The workshop was sponsored jointly by the Australian Freedom-From-Hunger Campaign, the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, and the South Pacific Commission. [399]

To be held December 1975, the aim of the workshop was, in addition to providing a refresher course for CETC graduates, to review existing women's programs. This coincided with departure of expatriates, and the CETC being under local leadership by 1975. In preparation for the workshop, participants were expected to submit Working Papers which 'describe the role of women and women's organizations in their nation's development programme, and to identify any special training needs for women they feel must be met if developmental priorities for better family living

[399] Letter to Representatives of Participating Governments, Territorial Administrations and Governments Routine Distribution from Dr Frank Mahony, Acting Secretary General, 1 August 1975, p 1

are to be fulfilled'. [400] Each territory was invited to send two participants, a former CETC graduate as well as a representative of the administration of the women's interests program.

The Colony recommended Mrs Katherine Tekanene (Women's Interests Officer) and Katalaina Malua (community worker).[401] The outcome of this workshop, along with similar others, enabled a strengthening of a regional consciousness and agenda for women's interests.

1977 Women's Conference

By 1977, the first two stages of the Colonial administration's women's interests plan had been implemented. The network of Homemaker's Club had been strengthened by the establishment of island associations *(Irekenrao).* The third stage was to create a National Federation of Associations and for this body to take over the responsibility of coordinating the Homemakers' Clubs. It was also intended that this body would be independent of government and would eventually come to be self-financed. With the support of the *Irekenrao,* the staff of the Women's Interests Office launched a campaign to hold a national women's conference that would coincide with the Colony's Constitutional Convention. The objective of the conference was to establish a National Council for Women (a

[400] ibid., p 4
[401] Letter to Dr Frank Mahony, Acting Secretary General RE SPC Sub Regional Workshop from Secretary for Health and Welfare, 31 October, 1975, p 1

popular trend throughout the Pacific post 1975 International Year for Women initiatives) as a national umbrella body to take over the coordination of women's interests from the government. On hearing the news, Mrs Cordon offered to return to Tarawa to assist in the organisation of the conference. However, Mrs Tekarei Russell as Minister of Health and Welfare, very gently declined Mrs Cordon's generous offer in favour of a Cook Island women's association representative, arguing that it would be in the best interest of the I-Kiribati women to learn from the experiences of a fellow Pacific Island women's organisation. This marked a turning point in how I-Kiribati women organised themselves.

In 1977, Miss McGrieger, General Secretary of ACWW, in response to hearing of the decision to host a national Women's Conference, wrote to Mrs Tekarei Russell as the Minister for Health and Welfare, offering the return of Mrs Cordon and her services in helping the women to arrange the conference. In private handwritten notes between the Mrs Russell and the Secretary for Health and Welfare, she wrote:

> I have spoken to our women regarding the possible visit of Mrs Cordon to assist with the Leadership Training Course next year. They are not very keen on the idea and point out that Mrs Cordon during her four (seven) years here was able to impart with all of her knowledge re Women's Interests and is unlikely to add anything new…I feel personally that we can run this course ourselves.[402]

[402] Note from Mrs Russell, Minister for Health and Welfare to the Secretary for Health and Welfare re: Letter to Mrs Russell, Minister of Health and Welfare from Miss McGreiger, General Secretary, ACWW, 3 December 1976

While Mrs Cordon's services were not required, the note confirmed the need to sensitively decline as the Conference needed external funding for it operational costs. The note went on to say:

> We will however need the financial help of A.C.W.W. or the course may be a non-starter. Perhaps we should point out to them the cost of feeding participants and any other expenses we can think of, requesting again assistance for travelling costs.[403]

Mrs Russell, in response to Mrs Cordon's offer to return to the Colony, wrote to Miss McGrieger, General Secretary of ACWW:

> It is most kind indeed of you to offer Mrs Cordon's services and we should all dearly love to welcome her back again. However, things have changed considerably since Mrs Cordon was working with us and women feel they need to seek closer contact and exchange ideas within the region. We have already negotiated with the South Pacific Commission to sponsor Mrs Graham, President of the Cook Islands Federation of Women's Institutes to advise us. We have every confidence that this lady can give us a great deal of help and in particular offer valuable experience with regard to co-operative economic ventures which interests our women so deeply and which we hope will add a completely new and vitally important dimension to our activities and our struggle to improve our status as a sex.[404]

She did however, raise the subject of funding and asked if any assistance may be available through the ACWW:

> We are not able yet to take any further steps about the conference until we have found the $2,000 necessary to subsidise transport and feeding costs of delegates. We had hoped that ACWW might be able to assist with this as Government is in no financial position to make more than a small contribution; neither do we feel that we can ask the clubs collectively to subscribe more than about $1,000 to assist as the world price for copra has slumped giving us here a heavily subsidised 6c to the cutter which is much less than in other Pacific territories whilst inflation grows rampant hitting our already impoverished rural families particularly hard. Thus we are

[403] ibid.
[404] Letter to Miss H McGrieger, General Secretary of ACWW from Mrs Russell, Minister of Health and Welfare, 17 November 1976

> obliged to seek oversees assistance in the hope that our Conference will spark off new ideas that will improve the economic as well as social circumstances of our clubs so that eventually our proposed Federation will be economically independent. [405]

To emphasise the need for funding, Mrs Russell pleaded:

> I can assure you that I attach the greatest importance to this Conference and feel that we should do all possible to gain financial aid from philanthropic sources to enable it to take place. In this context I am writing more as a woman and a mother and, indeed, a former community worker rather than a Minister because I know that our women's clubs will respond to any appeal to pay the costs of this conference but I know equally well that it will be their families and especially the children who will suffer from this drain on the family resources where a few cents are reckoned a great fortune. We are therefore asking the women delegates to make a comparatively small contribution towards the costs. [406]

Discussions over funding with the ACWW proved difficult as the ACWW were limited by restrictions of their UNESCO Gift Coupons. Miss McGreiger, General Secretary, ACWW, responded that she understood why the Colony has declined Mrs Cordon's offer and was 'delighted' by the news of inviting Mrs Graham from the Cook Islands. In terms of funding, she stressed the need for ACWW funding to be put towards nutrition and leadership activities. She explained the money cannot fund 'conferences' only training seminars. But she offered a way around this and requested to see the program as she suspected their plans for a 'conference' would include aspects that could be funded by the ACWW sponsored 'UNESCO Gift Coupon' funds.[407]

---

[405] ibid.
[406] ibid.
[407] Letter to Mrs Russell, Minister of Health and Welfare from Miss McGreiger, General Secretary, ACWW, 3 December 1976.

In search of funding, Mrs Russell wrote to the Minister of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC), Commonwealth Secretariat. In this, she refers to Dr S J Cookey's letter addressed to community worker Miss Aneuea 'about the possibility of obtaining aid from your fund to assist Mrs Graham of the Cook Islands women's Institutes to visit Tarawa during a Conference….to inaugurate an autonomous Gilbertese Federation of Women's Clubs'.[408] Mrs Russell wrote:

> This conference is seen by our Division …as the highest priority in 1977. Women here have been extremely successful and we can boast over 200 active clubs in nearly every village on each island. We feel however that club activities and philosophy have been dominated by enthusiastic European leadership and our Conference will seek to add a regional flavour and in particular to present ideas for economic co-operative club activities which we are sure will do a great detail to stimulate affiliated clubs as well as rural development in general… Many other Pacific Island Women's Federations give economic activities emphasis in programme planning and apparently this has been done successfully in the Cook Islands. We are most anxious to learn from Mrs Graham how they went about it. [409]

The letter requested a total of $AUD 1,330 for Mrs Graham's travel expenses, accommodation and incidentals. However, finding a suitable funding source proved problematic. In response, the CFTC wrote:

> The financial resources of CFTC are under severe stress at the present time. In these circumstances, we are not able to make awards in respect of only a limited number of projects that are of indisputable value in promoting economic and social development. Useful though Mrs Graham's visit would be, I regret that we cannot regard it as falling into the category of priority projects that we are able to support this financial year.[410]

---

[408] Letter to the Minister, Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, Commonwealth Secretariat, from Secretary to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, 18 November, 1976
[409] Letter to the Minister, Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, Commonwealth Secretariat, from Secretary to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, 18 November, 1976
[410] Letter to Secretary for Health and Welfare from P D Snelson, Director, Education & Training, for Managing Director, Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC), Commonwealth Secretariat, 7 December 1976,

Earlier that month, Mrs Russell wrote to the Governor requesting the possibility of the Colony paying for the travel costs of female delegates to attend the proposed national women's conference:

> We have been contemplating a Conference to inaugurate an independent National Federation of Women's clubs and had planned to hold it around Easter 1977. We are however, having a great deal of trouble finding funds, amounting to about $2000 to bring in two delegates from each Island and our negotiations with the Associated Countrywomen of the World which began most encouragingly are now becoming bogged down by conditions which we are finding are not acceptable. With His Excellency's permission, we should like to use the travel opportunity afforded by the Constitutional Convention to enable us to inaugurate the Women's Federation either directly before or after the Convention. In this way we should be able to make a dramatic cut in the estimated cost of the Conference and also be able to prepare delegates from Outer Islands with accommodating those who have no contacts on Tarawa.[411]

In response, His Excellency the Governor accepted the proposal, and 'agreed to your Ministry's request (to pay for women delegates to travel to Constitutional Convention)…but that the number should only be one from each island – hence 20 in all'.[412]

The date had been confirmed and a substantial part of the budget issues had been resolved by holding the Conference at the same time as the Constitutional Convention. The aim of the Conference was to inaugurate the Island Associations (*Irekenrao*) into a National Federation. The conference was also planned to be a learning opportunity and also offered training (in line with the ACWW UNESCO Gift Coupon funding requirements) to the delegates. The conference examined the

[411] Letter to His Excellency the Governor from Secretary to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, Governor's Office RE: Constitutional Convention,' 8 November, 1976
[412] Letter from Governor's Office to Secretary to Minister Health and Welfare, 24 November 1976

needs of women of the Colony and discussed such topics as how to improve 'the quality of life' through gardening and nutrition. This section included demonstrations from the agricultural department on how to grow 'greens' followed by recipes that incorporated them. Importantly, this section highlights the collaboration of the Women's Interests Office and other Departments. The conference stressed the importance of the 'pass-it-on' approach and of sharing knowledge, Significantly, the conference encouraged women to challenge traditional views and asked the questions, 'Old Customs we would like to see abolished, and why?'; 'Old Customs worth keeping, and why?'; 'New Customs of which we do not approve, and why?', and 'New Customs worth adopting, and why?'. The conference taught home-making skills such as the introduction of Western household equipment and how women could make these themselves. As all delegates were representatives of their *Irekenrao* and office-bearers of their clubs, the conference scrutinised the different roles played by key stakeholders in the women's interests movement. The role of the Women's Interests Office was discussed and women gained a greater understanding as how they would operate as a body of associations. Mr Lester James, Specialist in Out-of-School and Youth Education of the South Pacific Commission played a significant role in providing technical assistance towards the conference. It was agreed to follow the program he put forth as a recommendation in a letter to the Ministry of Health and Welfare. In this, the role of the Women's Interests Office was proposed:

1. To assist the Associations by letters and personal visits to make proper preparation for the Conference.
2. To check with Agriculture first, then to revive and re-issue compost-making, gardening, balanced meal and nutrition notes and supplements.

3. To consult with Agriculture for choice of plants, and to try to arrange for various stages of the chosen plants to be on view at the time of Conference. To request speakers on appropriate subjects.
4. To make arrangements for
    a. Visits of delegate;
    b. Panel of judges for meals;
    c. Panel of judges for house/garden design competition
    d. All speakers.
5. To prepare and practise recipes for using the vegetables to be grown and to produce leaflets for making the dishes.
6. To make transport arrangements, and to make early enquiries for adequate supplies of local foods.
7. To prepare notes for delegates' actions on return to islands.[413]

At the Island level, the role of the Associations/*Irekenrao* was to:

1. To prepare a report on the work of the Clubs and the Association to be given on the first day of the Conference.
2. To consult with its clubs for the following:
    a. Six volunteers from each Club to prepare compost from instructions to agree to plant and look after seeds to be issued, to show the rest of the club the plants in their various stages of growth, to make up recipes when fruit ripens and show to club members.
    b. House and garden designs to be entered for a competition.
    c. Advice from any or all Club members as to the use of P-I-O (Pass-it-on) Lessons issued by H.Q., and suggestions for improvements and further lessons required.
    d. Advice from any of all club members on talk to be given by delegate (topic pre-selected by Association from list issued by W.I. Section).
3. Association Committee members to collate information from clubs on P-I-O Lessons and Selected Topics, so that delegate may give in a reasoned and orderly manner the general opinion of the island.
4. Association Officers should discuss among themselves a menu for a well-balanced meal, and the delegate should be prepared to obtain the ingredients (though not to pay for them) and –with help from other delegates – prepare and serve the meal to the whole Conference.[414]

The manner in which the conference was run was focused on co-operation and friendship, and how the Women's Interests Office and *Irekenrao* would best work

[413] Letter to Mr John Pritchard, Senior Assistant Secretary, Division of Community Officers Affairs, Ministry of Health and Welfare from Mr Lester James, Specialist in Out-of-School, Youth Education, South Pacific Commission, 19 November 1976
[414] ibid.

together in a mutually beneficial relationship. The running of the conference would be a demonstration of how this could operate. Other topics of importance that were covered include, 'Women matter: What women can do' and the 'revival of old skills'. The conference program was a mixture of workshop- type discussions in conjunction with more formal lectures and demonstrations. Information was collated from various clubs and turned into pass-it-on lessons.

The climax of the conference was the agreement to formalise the *Irekenrao* into a National Federation, the *Aia Mwah Ainen Kiribati* (AMAK). Later, this AMAK was extended to represent all women's groups in Kiribati, significantly, the Catholic and Protestant Church-based groups. AMAK later provided the administrative support for the National Council of Women (NCW).

The archives reveal ongoing correspondence between the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the CETC and SPC, the influence of which is clear in the conference program. Despite a shift away a dependency on expatriates, as evident in the Ministry's declining of the offer of Mrs Cordon to assist, there was still a reliance on the expertise and knowledge of expatriates. In a letter to Mr John Pritchard, Senior Assistant Secretary, Division of Community Officers Affairs, Ministry of Health and Welfare, Lester James wrote:

> I have also written to ask Miss Sue (principal) at the CETC to send you any further information she may have on women's associations and particularly for suitable model constitutions. You might also wish to write to some of the consultants involved in the December 1975 SPC Regional Workshop on

Future Trends in the Development of Women's Programmes in the South Pacific Region for additional information.[415]

A decade and half earlier the women's interests program had been dependent on the expertise of specialists employed by the Colonial administration. By 1977, Kiribati women were organising themselves, by themselves (with regional assistance from the SPC) and for themselves. The national women's conference was a great success and a boost in confidence for the women's interests program. Funds were obtained, albeit difficulty, by approaching outside organisations (e.g. through the Australian and New Zealand Associated Country Women of the World); the event coincided with the 1977 Constitutional Convention thereby reducing costs of travel and accommodation for participants and possible regional examples from which to draw from were well researched and carried out.

Concluding remarks

By independence in 1979, the introduced idea of 'women's interests had been appropriated, negotiated and modified to be applicable to the context of Kiribati, and albeit fragile and tenuous, for a brief moment a national women's interests program had culminated in the successful execution of a national women's conference run for and by I-Kiribati women. Furthermore, this was an exciting time for women, some chosen to travel abroad, others meeting across a conference

[415] Letter to Mr John Pritchard, Senior Assistant Secretary, Division of Community Officers Affairs, Ministry of Health and Welfare from Mr Lester James, Specialist in Out-of-School, Youth Education, South Pacific Commission, 19 November 1976

table equally with expatriate experts and women leaders from atolls far from their own, some now a member of parliament, a principal or doctor. The concept of a national women's conference is important to be acknowledged as its delegates were women who, ten years before were decidedly local, quiet and invisible in Colony-wide affairs, but who in the space of a decade had engaged in development programs so influential that they now saw themselves at participants in a nation just two years away from raising its own flag.

The impact of the second wave of women of CETC graduates and the ability of the network to mobilise for political action, in the election of Mrs Russell, and then again for the national women's conference were benchmark moments in women changing their own perception of their role both inside and outside the family and village. Women were emerging as agents of change and organising themselves on a national level.

Chapter 7

‘We can stand on our own two feet’-

Independence, indigenisation and the rise of Church-based women’s clubs

The third wave of women leaders of the women’s interests movement emerged during a high point of social, economic and political changes within the Colony. The emergence of the third wave of women leaders coincided with dramatic political changes within the territory as the Colonial administration underwent a process of decolonisation as Tuvalu (the Ellice Islands) broke away in 1975 and achieved separate independence in 1978, and the British prepared the Gilbert Islands, (including the Phoenix, Line and Fanning Islands as well as Christmas Island and Banaba) for self-government. More significantly, leaders of the third wave were a part of the wider movement that saw the indigenisation of Pacific Churches. The period examined in this Chapter is loosely considered to be from 1971/1972, marking the election of border-dweller Mrs Tekarei Russell and departure of European advisor Mrs Roddy Cordon, to the transition from the Gilbert Islands Colony to the Republic of Kiribati and independence in 1979.

While the 1970s began as a promising decade for the Homemakers’ Club network and the Colonial administration’s policy for women’s interests, by the late 1970s, the government-based movement was beginning to unravel. Mrs Tekarei Russell, having served two terms in office, was unable to gain re-election in 1978.

Interviews reflecting on this period reveal that women's club members felt disheartened with Mrs Russell and many did not feel that she was able to achieve outcomes for women. By the late 1970s, the Homemaker network began to fracture as the Homemakers' Clubs were increasingly seen as being Protestant, much to the concern of Catholic women. The second wave women, returned CETC graduates, applied their newly developed skills in training and leadership to their own Church's women's fellowships. While women from both predominant Churches were sent to the CETC for training, the prominence of Protestant women in leadership positions within the Homemakers' Clubs and *Irekenrao* framework became more and more apparent.

The government-based Homemaker network was increasingly being identified as a Protestant domain. One explanation for the disparity between the growing numbers of Protestant as opposed to Catholic women in leadership positions in this space is due to the high proportion of nuns who underwent training at the CETC, fulfilled their government requirements but then returned to their obligations to service the spiritual and pastoral needs of their Church. A further explanation is based on the inherent differences in the teachings and views of women of each respective Church. Some have argued, in the context of Kiribati, that Protestant teaching is seen to view women as 'equal in potential in public positions, although in the home the husband must be the leader' whereas, Catholic teaching 'tends to restrict women to their family roles'.[416] To compound this issue, the Protestant

[416] Marshall, (1996), op. cit., p 75.

Church, as early as 1961, had begun to implement strategies which would ensure its sustainability post-independence. The female members of the congregation were eager to contribute (through fundraising and community initiatives) and as a result, Church-based women's clubs were strengthened.

The late-1970s marks a transition in the women's interests movement whereby the second wave women leaders began to transfer their expertise and knowledge into their respective women's fellowships, thereby inadvertently strengthening Church-based clubs outside and independent of the Homemakers' network. By the late 1970s, a strong division based on rivalry and competition over limited resources between Catholic and Protestant as well as Homemaker women was evident. The Pacific-wide indigenisation of island Churches during this time further compounded this division.

Building on from studies of Melanesian women's groupings, significantly the collection of articles published in *Oceania* in 2003 compiled by Douglas and Jolly,[417] this Chapter examines the structure and function of Church-based women's clubs and how they have developed and indigenised in an historical context. Douglas described how, '[n]ow almost totally indigenised, women's fellowships are normal – if variously active and effective – features of the socio-economic landscape in communities throughout Melanesia and Oceania generally notably in rural

[417] See Douglas, B. (2003a). Prologue. In B. Douglas (Ed.), *Women's groups and everyday modernity in Melanesia,* Special Issue. *Oceania, 74*, 1- 5; Jolly, M. (2003). Epilogue. In B. Douglas (Ed.), *Women's groups and everyday modernity in Melanesia,* Special Issue. *Oceania, 74*, pp 134-147

areas'.[418] She also noted how, '[m]embership of a fellowship gives women a protected, increasingly respected space where they can build solidarity, confidence and leadership or managerial skills and which usually supplies their only or main opportunity for socially or collective action beyond the family'.[419] Evidence is presented in the 2003 special issue of *Oceania* to show that introduced ideas regarding women's interests were appropriated and modified by informal Church-based women's fellowships resulting in a national model for women's interests that was applicable for, and run by, grassroots women. My own Chapter positions histories of missionaries in the GEIC within regional trends of development of Island Churches. The foundational analysis of Charles Forman, the leading academic and only author on the role of women regionally within histories of Island Churches, will be analysed against developments in the GEIC. The Chapter concludes by examining the role of women in this space.

Arrival of missionaries

The Protestant American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) was the first to establish a mission in the Gilbert Group. After attempts in Butaritari and Makin in 1852, Rev. Hiram Bingham and his wife, along with Hawaiian missionary Kanoa and his wife, arrived in Abaiang in November of 1857.[420] While

[418] Douglas, (2003),op. cit., pp 13-14
[419] ibid., p 9
[420] Despite limited success in converting Gilbertese, the Bingham's most significant contribution to Christianity in the Gilberts was the translation of the Bible to Gilbertese. One author has commented, the Bingham's gave the Gilbertese a written form of their language' (Etekiera, K.

the Gilbertese displayed an interest in the new religious teachings, they were reluctant to part with their own beliefs. In 1859, the first Church in the Gilberts was constructed at Koinawa, Abaiang, albeit with paid labour rather than volunteered. In 1870, the London Missionary Society (LMS) was a firmly established and successful mission in the Southern Gilberts. Up until 1900, the LMS missions were largely supervised by Polynesian teachers, predominantly from Samoa. In 1917, the LMS (with Samoan teachers) took over the work of the ABCFM. Importantly during this period, the LMS protected Gilbertese from blackbirders. The modern version, the Kiribati Protestant Church, remains one of the dominant Churches in Kiribati today.[421]

The arrival of the Roman Catholic Church to the Gilberts had quite different origins to that of the Protestant Church. In the 1870s, two Gilbertese men, Betereo and Tiroi, were recruited from Nonouti to work in Tahiti. After converting abroad, the two men returned to Nonouti in 1880 and began converting people (experiencing similar difficulties as the protestant missions). The small Catholic community began instructing children in the new faith and built eight small Churches. After requests for missionaries from Samoa, three arrived from the Sacred Heart Mission in 1888, among them Father J. Leracy, later to become the first bishop of the Gilberts Islands. To encourage conversions, gifts of cloth and tobacco were given. Etekiera

---

(1992), Te Aro: The New Religion. In Talu, Sister A et. al. (1979). *Kiribati: Aspects of history*. (pp 36-43) Tarawa: Ministry of Education, Training and Culture, p 39). See also Macdonald, 1982, op.cit., p 33

[421] Etekiera, (1992), op. cit., pp 36-38; Macdonald, (1982), op. cit., pp 31-54

claimed that people came to receive gifts rather than listen to the new teachings.[422] To allow the mission station in Nonouti to acquire land, some Gilbertese traded land for sticks of tobacco. Along with religious instruction, the Catholic mission also taught Latin, mathematics, reading and writing. From Nonouti, Catholicism spread, aided by more priests and sisters sent to help. The success of the Catholic Mission in the northern and central Gilberts and the establishment of the LMS in the southern Gilberts meant that little progress was made by either mission to expand into their rival's territory.[423] This division was to cause ongoing rivalry which had a profound impact on the women's interests movement in the 1970s.

Regional developments of Island Churches

The strength of the Church-based clubs can be understood by examining the regional historical development and eventual indigenisation of Pacific Island Churches. The most pivotal author of this literature is Charles Forman, significantly his monograph 'The Island Churches of the South Pacific' (1982)[424] and book chapter 'Sing to the Lord a New Song' (1987).[425] Forman noted that early missionaries 'initially projected a strongly masculinist image'.[426] First missionaries were men accompanied by their wives. Missionary women did not hold any formal positions within the Church structure. However, women were involved in weekly

[422] Etekiera, (1992), op. cit.
[423] Etekiera, (1992), op. cit., pp 39-43; Macdonald, (1982), op. cit., pp 31-54
[424] Forman, (1982), op. cit..
[425] Forman, (1987), op. cit.
[426] ibid., 155

rituals of Christian worship. Prior to Western Christianity, Pacific women performed minor roles in local religious practices (with some exceptions in Tonga and Samoa). In the early 1900s the general picture was of female exclusion. Initially there was resistance to female attendance and participation at Church services (for example, women were not allowed to sing in choirs or pray out loud). Rather 'religious participation other than in worship developed slowly for island women, with the assistance of missionary wives'.[427]

To coincide with the establishment of theological schools to train pastors for Pacific Churches, 'wives of missionaries provided special training to the wives of future teachers and pastors'.[428] These schools can be argued to be the 'first centers for women's work in the Church'.[429] The first of these was established in the Gilbert Islands in 1900 offering training in Bible study, domestic arts, child care and 'methods for leading women's Church meetings'[430] as well as training women in health care.[431] Following on came special girls' schools which were typically set up by single female missionaries. These schools offered new opportunities for women in island Churches. By the late nineteenth century the numbers of female missionaries had increased and this continued as a trend throughout the colonial world. In the Gilbert Islands, the first Protestant female missionary was Rev. Bingham's wife, Mrs M.C. Bingham. The first school for girls was set up in 1913 in Rongorongo, Beru. Miss Pateman arrived in Beru in the early 1920s to further the

[427] ibid., 157
[428] ibid.
[429] ibid.
[430] ibid.
[431] ibid

work of the school and spent the majority of her 30 years of work in the Pacific educating Gilbertese girls.[432] The role of single women as missionaries was a colonial trend. The work of these women was predominantly in women's education and teaching in girls' schools, the impact of which was more indirect than direct. There was not an immediate elevated role for island women in the Church; rather it was that access to education (formal and informal) enabled greater opportunities. This was particularly evident as Protestant girl students were then sought after as wives of aspiring pastors and teachers.[433]

Regionally, the role of a pastor's wife emerged and provided leadership for the female members of the congregation. The pastor served the male members, the wife the female. The women's meetings would include Bible study, prayer and hymns, as well as lessons on child-care, hygiene and handicrafts.[434] In terms of Protestantism in the Gilberts in the post-war period, Garrett observed that 'Pastor's wives and women's organisations were an important source of power in church and social life.'[435] In the Pacific region, the role of pastor's wives was most significant and noticeable in the Cook Islands, Samoa, Tuvalu, Loyalty Islands, Tahiti, the south coast of Papua and Kiribati, predominantly in the LMS Churches, where Macdonald

[432] Manaima, R. B. (1988). *A reflection on the role of women in the Kiribati context in relation to culture:* A project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Divinity Degree. Pacific Theological College, Suva, Fiji, p 33; see also Garret, (1997), op. cit., p 276
[433] Forman, (1987), op. cit., p 159
[434] ibid.
[435] Garrett, (1997), op. cit., p 276

considered Protestant Christianity to have '…brought about a social revolution that was no less remarkable for its rapidity than for its apparent completeness'.[436] [437]

The influence of Samoan LMS missionaries and their wives in the late 1800s and early 1900s had a significant impact, both regionally and in the GEIC. In particular, 1900-1921 was a great period for Indigenous missionary activity. The Samoan wives of Indigenous pastors were active in leading women's meetings and the informal education of women on 'gardening, childcare and cooking'.[438] In the context of the GEIC, 'missionary wives showed new possibilities'.[439] Missionary wives introduced their counterparts to new arts and crafts, new crops, contributed to knowledge of improved local nutrition, new songs, games and styles of music. Importantly, Indigenous pastor's wives provided religious instruction to women.[440] They also played a pivotal role in establishing schools and Churches. The Samoan missionary wives received many services in return from the Church women which began a legacy of raised prestige of pastor's wives. Also important was the role of the wives of deacons (LMS). Deacons also administered Church organisations and their wives played a similar role to pastors' wives as leaders within the female congregation.

---

[436] Macdonald, (1982), op. cit., p 49
[437] Teeruro Ieuti also traces the history of the Kiribati Protestant Church see Ieuti, T (1992) The Kiribati Protestant Church. In Charles Forman (Ed) *Island Churches: Challenge and Change*. Suva, Fiji: Pacific Theological College
[438] Forman, (1987), op.cit., p 160
[439] ibid.
[440] ibid.

Pre-Christianity, a woman's status was through birth. Christianity caused a shift whereby status was based on marriage, and to a great extent, marriages were based on the level of education of both the husband and wife. During the early 1900s in the GEIC, it became increasingly important in Protestant Christianity for the pastors to have an educated wife. This led to the establishment of schools for girls. [441]

Education of girls

The arrival of missionaries also brought with it the introduction of Western forms of education. As Talu argued, the early introduction of Western education meant education for boys, while the girls stayed at home and learnt to be good mothers and wives.[442] Within the Protestant community, calls for the education of girls came as the need for pastor's wives to be well educated became evident. The first Girls' School in 1913 on Rongorongo, Beru, was set up and run by Mrs Goward and Beatrice Simmons from its opening until joined by educationalist Miss E. M. Pateman in 1922. According to Manaima, the aim of the school was to:

> educate the wives of the men who were being trained to be future teachers and ministers of the Church. Not only to educate them but to help them to understand their roles in their husband's work, as well as to develop their own understand[ing] of ministerial work. In addition, however, those wives were taught general knowledge – geography, arithmetic, history, health science and domestic skills.[443]

---

[441] Manaima, R. B. (1988).op cit., p 33
[442] Talu, (1992), op. cit., p 178
[443] Manaima, (1988). op. cit. p 33

Manaima explains:

> Naturally the school was often referred to as "Aia Reirei Aine Numa" where the emphasis was put upon their being trained and equipped for ministerial work, especially upon their knowing how to act as a pastor's wife. From this beginning there emerged the need for further development so that women were not only trained for ministerial work, but were helped to understand that they could pass on their knowledge and skill to other women who were still ignorant.[444]

In 1955, a Catholic School for girls was established at Taborio, North Tarawa. The British Colonial administration, while identifying the establishment of a government-funded school for girls as a high priority in 1945, did not allocate funding until 1959. The British administration's hesitancy and reluctance to fund the Elaine Bernacchi Girls' Secondary School (EBS) school was a part of a:

> wider campaign to restrict the Colony's recurrent commitments to the level of its income in a future without phosphate. Economic planning was also influenced by the knowledge that the copra contract with the United Kingdom would expire in 1957, and the expectation that copra revenue would be sharply reduced once the Colony had to sell on the open market. Thus basic capital developments – the administrative headquarters, the hospital, the high schools, and Betio harbour – caused few problems because they could be financed from Colonial Development and Welfare grants but projects for the Outer Islands, for example, were held back from the development programme for 1955-1960'.[445] Furthermore, the programme prioritised the 'improvement of social services and increasing efficiency and economy of the administration rather than economic development'.[446]

Writing in her memoirs, Mrs Cordon describes the EBS in the following passage:

> On the north-east side of this compound was the Elaine Bernacchi Girls' Secondary School, inaugurated by Lady Gutch, the High Commissioner's wife, and named after the wife of the then Resident Commissioner, M. L. Bernacchi, C.M.G. The first Headmistress was Mrs Ward, who undertook the venture initially and established it in the crucial first few years of its

[444] ibid.
[445] Macdonald, (1982), op. cit. p 171
[446] Cited in ibid.

> existence. It was a totally new venture in the Colony, against custom to even think of educating girls, but started with the advice of Freda Gwilliam, educational Adviser in the Ministry of Overseas Development, and with Colonial Development and Welfare Funds.

Citing Mrs Tekarei Russell, Mrs Cordon included the following extract from the first School Magazine (1965) which provides a narrative on the early history of the school:-

> It was in the year 1959, before the third term, when the first Girls Secondary School was finally completed. During the course of the year the Headmistress and a member of staff had been appointed, and seventeen girls were selected from the island schools. The school is the first of its kind in the Colony. By establishing the school, the Government has enabled the young women, regardless of their faith, to have sufficient education (although not equal to that of the men) to equip them for careers or homemaking. An important contribution is that it shows that women too have a most valuable part to play.[447]

Mrs Russell acknowledged the change in custom in regard to allowing girls to leave the family unit to attend the EBS:

> Parents were taken aback by the idea of their daughters leaving them for several years, and going to live in a strange place. The girls, whose duty it is to stay with their parents, were (and probably still are) not too sure of what to expect in their new environment. Both the parents and their daughters who dared to break away from this custom are to be congratulated.[448]

The passage reflected on the early developments and contribution of the staff and pupils:

> During the past five years the school has grown considerably. The first pupils have taken up many important posts within the Colony, and some are studying overseas. To Mrs Ward who devoted her whole time to raising the standard of the school, we owe a great deal. The contribution given by all ex-pupils must not be forgotten, because it was also due to their unfailing support and labour that the school has developed into a happy home. To all who have served the school in the past we must show our gratefulness by remembering just how much E.B.S. has done for us, and to strive to make it an even better place in which to live and study. For the girls who are now at

[447] Russell cited in Cordon, (1996), op. cit., p 44
[448] Russell cited in ibid, p 45

> the school, and for those who come in the future, the foundation has been laid. It is up to each one to make her contribution by working hard both in and out of school. The name of the school is not known by its buildings, but by the students who study here. Let us put our hearts and energy into making the name of Elaine Bernacchi School ring with honour".[449]

The emergence of government and Church schools in the Colony addressed the need for the formal education of girls. The next step of the Colony plan was to address the informal education of adult women.

Women's organisations

Prior to the arrival of missionaries, traditionally women formed groups within their kinship groups to work and to socialise. These informal groups were in a sense naturally formed within the extended family. As this thesis presents, women's groups, through the process of forming women's clubs, became more formal during the 1960s and 1970s. Forman's writings confirm that, 'women carved out their places in the Churches through their organisations as well as their offices'.[450] It is therefore not surprising that women's clubs, formed artificially through the Homemakers' network, were less successful as there was no foundation for cohesiveness. The Church-based women's clubs, on the other hand, were built on an existing sense of belonging and unity through existing women's fellowships.

[449] Ibid., pp 45 – 46
[450] Forman, (1987), op. cit., p 162

Early Church-based women's organisations were originally started by wives of early European missionaries and pastors. By 1896, a 'manual for the meetings and services of Protestant women led by pastor's wives was published in Kiribati'.[451] Regionally, women's Church groups were first formed in eastern and central Pacific Islands and developed later in the western islands. By the 1930s there is evidence of women's groups in Solomon Islands, Papua and New Guinea. From local women's groups evolved national women's organisations in the Churches which, 'paralleled and influenced the national Church structures'.[452] Local groups were present in the GEIC however took longer to form national organisations. This reflected a regional trend whereby 'other Churches founded by the LMS but lacking as much Samoan participation, such as those in Kiribati, the Society islands and the Cook Islands, had no comparable national women's assemblies.'[453]

Outside Samoa, the largest women's organisations were based in Fiji. One was set up by missionary wife Mrs Ronald Derrick in 1924 and although not strictly a Church group (focused on home economics and childcare) it spread through Church connections. Mrs Derrick retired after 20 years and the organisation became completely under the leadership of Indigenous women, and changed its name from *Qele ni Ruve* to *Soqosoqo Vakamaram*. Under local leadership, the organisation shifted focus from home-based to public affairs. Led by Methodist missionary wife Mrs Gould, another significant women's organisation was set up in 1949. As a

[451] ibid.; also see Manaima, (1988), op. cit.
[452] Forman, (1987), op. cit., p 162
[453] ibid., p 163

legacy of these early developments, Fijian women 'emerged as influential leaders in the Pacific'.[454]

After the Second World War, local women's groups and national organisations for Church women appeared in much of the southwest Pacific. However, these organisations had less Indigenous participation than demonstrated in Samoa and Fiji. For example, in 1957, the Vanuatu Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union was launched, based on a model copied from New Zealand. By 1968, the LMS and Methodists Churches merged and 'the United Church Women's Fellowship … was politically more important and more indigenised than any other Church women's groups of the Western Pacific'.[455] Pacific governments, as this thesis argues, also organised women's groups. Forman noted that at a regional level of observation, these groups sometimes competed but usually co-operated with Church groups.[456] On the contrary, in the case of Kiribati, rivalry and competition was rife and double barrelled; between the government and Church-based groups, as well as among the Church groups – Protestants and Catholics.

The general timeline of the development of women's groups regionally began in the 1920s, with the formation of women's health committees active in Samoa and the Cook Islands, and later, active in the GEIC by the1940s. By the 1950s and 1960s, the Kiribati government had inaugurated women's programs and organisations, assisted by the SPC. Regionally, this was also taking place in New Caledonia, Papua

[454] ibid.
[455] ibid., p 164
[456] ibid.

New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and the Cook Islands. Catholic women's organisations were smaller and less influential than their Protestant counterparts and, as a regional observation, tended to lack a strong national organisation or Indigenous leadership.

The Catholic movement largely began with the emergence of boarding schools for island girls. In the Gilbert Islands a boarding school for girls was established at Taborio in 1955 (four years prior to the government all-girls school in 1959). Forman observed that, 'Girls who had spent years living with the sisters began to express a desire for emulating the kind of life they had observed'.[457] I-Kiribati/Tuvaluan academic, Sister Alaima Talu, is a case in point.

As early as the 1870s, Samoan women were allowed to join the same Catholic order as their missionary sisters, however, with modified rules for their observance. By the late 1800s, a new order 'Helpers of the Sisters' was established in Fiji, New Caledonia, Wallis Island and Tonga as a pathway for Indigenous nuns. While training officially began in 1940, 'the first seven members took the habit in 1950'.[458] Most of these, as well as later Indigenous nuns, entered the Order of (Our Lady of) the Sacred Heart rather than staying in the Indigenous orders. Generally, Indigenous nuns were given menial work, such as washing, cooking, gardening, taking care of the Church buildings, all under the supervision of European superiors. The Second World War became a turning point whereby 'Indigenous sisters in war-

[457] Forman, (1987), op. cit., p 165
[458] ibid., p 166

devastated areas revealed faithfulness and strength that led to greater recognition of their abilities'.[459] Furthermore, 'throughout Oceania new avenues of education and work were opened up to women, chiefly in teaching and nursing'.[460]

In 1966 the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) opened with three of the total 58 students belonging to the Papuan women's order. The second half of the twentieth century saw increased numbers of Indigenous sisters throughout the Pacific and increasingly indigenised leadership so that 'with these developments, Pacific Island women participated significantly in the life of the Catholic Church'.[461] Orders of Indigenous brothers 'never took hold in Oceania',[462] rather, Pacific men largely chose to become priests over joining the brotherhood, and there were far more Indigenous sisters than priests (this is perhaps explained by the demand for higher qualifications of priests). There were also more public and commercial opportunities available to young Indigenous men than women who experienced a more restricted and subservient village life.[463] As a result, 'women found Church vocations more attractive than did men'.[464] However, despite large numbers of Indigenous nuns, it was largely the island men who 'determined the direction and polices of the Church, while women have continued to play supportive and secondary roles'.[465]

---

[459] ibid., pp 166-7
[460] ibid., p 167
[461] ibid.
[462] ibid.
[463] ibid,. p 168
[464] ibid.
[465] ibid.

Church-based women's groups in Kiribati

By the early 1960s, the Protestant Women's fellowship was gaining momentum and mobilising towards the formation of a national coordinating body. By 1961, one member from each island of the *Baba-n-Aine* (Women's Board) attended the opening of the Tangitebu Theological College. At this gathering the women decided to meet after the opening and discuss their future. They voted to rename *Te Baba - n-Aine* (Board of Women) to *Reita-n-Aine Kamutu*[466] (RAK), recognising the need for good linkages in the hope of strengthening the group at a national level.[467] The RAK consolidated during these years and began to develop a national agenda for promoting the spiritual and daily needs of Gilbertese women. The first Pre-Assembly meeting of the RAK was held on the 18 March 1968, one week before the First General Assembly of the national Gilbert Islands Protestant Church (later renamed Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC)). Manaima described:

> From their times of sharing they built up a fellowship which was known in those days as "Women's Board". After the meeting held at Tangintebu in 1962, the women who were representatives to the Board from their respective islands met and discussed changing the name of their fellowship to a more appropriate title. Hence, it is now known as "Reita N Aine Ki Kamatu". The aim of this fellowship when first introduced was for the women to share the task of the Church ministry, especially its financial struggle. The RAK has now become a widely known fellowship because of its great influence, and its large contribution to the Church.[468]

The RAK remains active today and is instrumental in providing welfare-based community education for Protestant women.

---

[466] *Reita* meaning 'to connect or to join', *Aine* meaning 'women'

[467] The national focus of the RAK at this time was a direct result of the strengthening of the Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC) at a national level (Baati Binoka, T. (personal communication, April 6, 2009)).

[468] Manaima, (1988), op. cit., pp 32-4

Image 15: RAK women at International Women's Day Celebrations in Bairiki, South Tarawa 2008

A decade later, the Catholic women had united and formed the *Teitoingaina* as their national coordinating body. Prior to 1978, Catholic women's groups had been established informally by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Mission (OLSH) working on the Outer Islands and on Tarawa. By the late 1970s, there was a Catholic women's club for each parish on every island. These informal groups consisted of the female congregational members and were normally headed by the catechist's wife. Women in these groups were mainly mothers who were keen to learn new skills such as cooking and sewing. This was especially the case on the Outer Islands. As the Protestant women had successfully established a national coordinating body for their women, the Catholic women decided to follow suit. In

1978, a core group of women[469] in collaboration with Fr. Paul Mea (later to become the first I-Kiribati Bishop a year later) established an umbrella organisation for all Catholic groups. Catholic women in every village on Tarawa were combined and a formal committee was set-up. The newly established Catholic women's group received a gift of money. Sr. Frances on behalf of *Teitoingaina*, opened an account and banked the money under the name 'Morning Star'. *Teitoingaina* was recognised and registered with the government as the Catholic Women's Club. The main aims of *Teitoingaina* were (and in many cases, continue to be) to promote:

- Catholic family values
- the standard of living of women and their families
- women's health and family nutrition
- women's dignity
- the widening women's knowledge of traditional handicrafts and home-economics,
- the sharing of skills and ideas among women, and
- well-organised training services throughout Kiribati.[470]

Teitoingaina officially includes all female members of the Catholic Church.

[469] The women were Sr. Katarina Kauongo, Ruta Viane, Tataa Tibau, Ellen Mulla and Tue Taake. The committee members were known as 'just your ordinary' women (Kauongo, Sr. K (personal communication March 9 2008).
[470] Nabatiku, Katimira (personal communication March 17 2008)

Image 16: *Teitoingaina* Catholic Women's March Past at International Women's Day celebrations, Bairiki, South Tarawa 2008

On 10 February 1979, Fr. Paul Mea, who had been instrumental in assisting the Catholic women to establish *Teitoingaina*, was ordained as the first I-Kiribati Bishop. The participation of *Teitoingaina* in the ordination helped to cement a formal acknowledgement of the organisation within the increasingly indigenised and localised Church structure. The participation of *Teitoingaina* in the ceremonial proceedings symbolised the collaboration between the group and the Bishop. *Teitoingaina* were heavily involved in the preparation for the event. Interview participants recalled the event as a joyous affair and positioned the role of *Teitoingaina* as a 'coming of age' story. The interviews retold the story of Outer Island Catholic groups being represented and contributing to the event (each club

was asked to donate a woven bowl as a gift for the ordination). One lady representative, Tue Taake, crocheted a cushion for the Bishop's chair. The women organised the field for the ordination ceremony and decorated the Church. Members of the congregation and the Sisters prepared the food. It was a pivotal moment for all Catholics in Kiribati, especially the women as they recollected, they 'were so happy to see the Morning Star' – the symbol of the *Teitoingaina,* being such a public part of the ceremonial proceedings.[471]

By tracing the formation of the national organisations of Church-based groups, a pattern emerges. The women prominent within the formation process and also those who became leaders post-independence, were women who had trained at the CETC and who, after serving the Colony, returned to work for their respective Church. Leaders within the third wave were predominantly nuns and later lay women who either never married (for example Aroita Williams) or were widows (such as Katimira Nabatiku). A narrative of the successive Directors of the *Teitoingaina* is presented below as a case study.

Sr. Katarina Kauongo, a graduate of the CETC home economics training course in 1977, worked in the Women's Interests Office under the Department of Health in Bikenibu, South Tarawa on her return from Fiji. While working for the Colonial government, she remained a representative of the *Aienen te Katorika* (the Catholic

[471] Rautu, Sister F. (personal communication, March 20, 2008) (trans. Sr. Alaima Talu); Kauongo, Sr. K (personal communication March 9, 2008); Nabatiku, Katimira (personal communication March 17, 2008); Williams, Aroita (personal communication March 12, 2008) (trans Sr. Alaima Talu)

women). After finishing her time at the Women's Interests Office, Sr. Katarina became a founding member and the first Director of *Teitoingaina*. She then became the Principal of St Anne's Preschool, Bairiki, South Tarawa.[472]

Sr Frances Ruatu graduated from the CETC in 1976. During her time at the CETC she was trained in needlework, sewing and cooking. After her one year course in Suva, she returned to Kiribati where she worked in Manuka and Tarawa. She was chosen as *Teitoingaina* Director by the *Maungatabu* (Church Assembly) shortly after the establishment of the group and remained as Director until 1986. After this, she moved to Taborio where she continued to work with the Catholic women on North Tarawa.[473]

Aroita Williams became the first lay Director of *Teitoingaina* in 1986. In 1963 she spent six months in Hawai'i at the East West Centre learning sewing, dressmaking, drafting patterns and machine maintenance. On her return, she worked with the Sisters at the convent. In 1973 she attended the CETC course and during this time she refined her dressmaking and sewing skills and also learnt gardening and cooking. Once again, she returned to Tarawa and continued working with the Sisters visiting and sharing skills that she had learnt abroad with Catholic women on the Outer Islands. Aroita also worked for the Ministry of Health, under the Women's Interests Office and for the Ministry of Home Affairs. She remains the

[472] Kauongo, Sr. K (personal communication March 9, 2008)
[473] Rautu, Sister F. (personal communication, March 20, 2008) (trans. Sr. Alaima Talu)

Director of *Teitoingaina.*[474] In 1988, after a year of training at CETC, Katimira Nabatiku joined *Teitoingaina* as Assistant Director.[475] As the personal histories of the three Directors of *Teitoingaina* reveal, the CETC training was a defining feature of each woman's life story and her leadership role within the organisation.

By independence in 1979, the two prominent Churches had formalised their women's fellowship structures nationally. In the years leading to independence, a growing rivalry had emerged between the two groups.[476] This tension was most apparent during Outer Island tours of community workers. Due to the isolation and distance between atolls in Kiribati, visits by government-sponsored community workers were sporadic and occurred annually with limited time available to visit each village. The rivalry between the Catholic and Protestant women along with attempts to establish Homemakers' Clubs confused women at the village level and hindered the work of Women's Interests Office. Community workers frequently reported rivalries and misunderstandings along Church lines.[477]

The 1974 Beru Tour Report provides a typical example of misunderstanding between a Homemakers' club and the RAK. The community worker explains, '[t]here is only one Catholic member [in the Homemaker's Club] as they said that the clubs…belonged to the Protestant Church. I told them that the club …belongs

---

[474] Williams, Aroita (personal communication March 12, 2008) (trans Sr. Alaima Talu)
[475] Nabatiku, Katimira (personal communication March 17, 2008);
[476] For early accounts of the tension between the Catholic and Protestant missionaries, see Sabatier, E. (1977). *Astride the equator: An account of the Gilbert Islands.* Trans Ursula Nixon, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[477] Rotuma experienced a similar history of religious rivalry. See Langi, J (1992) The History of the Methodist Church in its Rotuman Setting. In Charles Forman (Ed) *Island Churches: Challenge and Change*. Suva, Fiji: Pacific Theological College

to the Government.'[478] One of the most violent outbursts occurred during the early introduction of the women's clubs to the Colony. The *Colony Information Notes* for 1967 reported:

> As a result of a disagreement between the members of the Tamana Women's Club and other women on the island mass brawling broke out on the Government Station on 24th August. At a special meeting of the Tamana Island Council on 1st September, at which representatives of the two warring factions were present, peace was restored and the women agreed to bury their differences and to share all communal activities. The fighting between the women resulted in thirteen of them being charged under the Penal Code, and it is anticipated that when investigations have been completed a further 18 charges may be laid.[479]

The indigenisation of the Churches in turn politicised and entrenched the Catholic – Protestant divide.

While problems remained between the various women's clubs (resulting in the collapse of the National Council of Women less than a two decades later), the Church-based clubs continued to thrive and strengthen. Within the Kiribati context, the approach of working within the two Church organisational structures provided a platform from which ideas of women's interests and women's development could be more easily absorbed. Utilising Christian women's fellowships provided the medium through which foreign ideas related to gender and development could be adopted, modified and embraced by I-Kiribati society (by both men and women). Jolly argues, 'Christianity is … usually seen as inherently local, as fundamental to the Pacific way and as foundational to the imagination of

[478] Tour of Beru Report, 1974, Women's Interests Office, Ministry of Health and Welfare (Unpublished manuscript), p 1.
[479] (1967). News from the Outer Islands – Tamana. *Colony Information Notes*, *37*, p 4.

most Pacific nations'.[480] For many I-Kiribati women, the Christian faith promotes gender equality, as one woman explained, according to her Christian faith, her belief was 'in persons…regardless of gender or sex, the gravity of sin [is] all the same'.[481]

Concluding Remarks

By the end of the 1970s, the newly formed Church-based clubs began to compete with the Homemakers' Clubs for membership and access to funding. Competition and rivalry between Catholic and Protestant women further hindered attempts to create Homemakers' Clubs and thereby implement a national women's interests program. Homemakers' Clubs that were established largely had either an all Catholic or all Protestant membership. These women typically belonged to both their village Homemakers' Clubs and Church club and many informants recall being under pressure to contribute time and funds to both organisations. Rather than empowering their lives, women's clubs were beginning to drain women of their time and take them away from their families.

The medium of the Church and the position of Church-based women's clubs as a respected women's place within the community legitimised women's interests. The structure of the Church and its position of prestige within the national

---

[480] Jolly, M. (2005). Beyond the horizon? Nationalisms, feminisms, and globalization in the Pacific. *Ethnohistory, 52*(1), p 140.
[481] Baiteke, I. (personal communication, May 22, 2007)

consciousness gave legitimacy to the work of Church-based women's clubs. Women's clubs without this claim to a higher structure were either less successful or failed completely. By remaining committed to the work of the Church, Church-based women's clubs allowed a space from which women could be organised, administered and financed independently, while still maintaining legitimacy as being a part and representative of the larger Church body.

Churches in the Gilbert Islands in the 1970s were dependent on their female membership for fundraising and community education as well as outreach activities. Furthermore, women's clubs were utilised to advocate the beliefs of the Church through the promotion of Christian family life, ensuring the next generation of children were educated and adherent to this belief. Women adopted and adhered to the teachings and structures of the Church while maintaining independence as a community body with an independent women's interests program. While this program was intrinsically linked to the larger Church agenda, women's fellowships allowed a space for women to assess the needs of women and their families. These needs were then discussed at the Annual General Meeting and a program which incorporated these needs was then adopted. The program was coordinated from headquarters, much like the Homemakers' relationship to the Women's Interests Office , and implemented throughout the Outer Islands.

In the 1970s, Church-based women's clubs had adopted the strategies of a national women's interests program and implemented them within their own fellowships. This process began in the mid-1960s with the RAK (formalised in 1968) and later by

the *Teitoingaina* (1978). By independence in 1979, the formalisation of the two predominant Church-based clubs led to the implementation of Church-based women's interests programs which largely undermined attempts to create and implement a national women's interests program through the mechanism of the Homemaker's Clubs.

Despite this, the formalisation of the two Church-based women's clubs illustrates the historical process whereby Gilbertese women, through loosely existing women's fellowships, negotiated and exploited their position within the structure of the Church to create a locally based, but nationally sanctioned, women's interests program, albeit two distinct programs based on Church affiliations. Despite the initial success of the Colonial policy's establishment of village based Homemakers' Clubs, it was the Church-based clubs that utilised the notion of a formalised structure to strengthen their own organisations. The two prominent Churches, the Protestant Church and Catholic Church, separated themselves from Colonial policy and established their own women's interests programs in competition.

The indigenisation of the women's movement occurred during a high point of social, economic and political changes within the Colony, but not along the intended Colonial/ SPC framework. Rather, the simultaneous indigenisation of the Church in the Gilbert Islands strengthened and legitimised the position of Church-based women's clubs. The sequence of events in this Chapter proves once again that a history of any Colony, territory or nation in the Pacific is integrally linked and

inseparable from its mission and Church history. In the GEIC, the mobilisation of women, their emergence in the national arena, and the role and status of women's organisations, has parallels with other Pacific entities. However, the women of the GEIC, seemingly bound to different religions, and seemingly restricted by their traditional gendered role in society, also impressed their own design on women's interest as it evolved in the 1970s.

Chapter 8

'Us women run before we can walk' –

Positioning the collapse of the National Federation of

Women in post-independence Kiribati

This Chapter provides an historical narrative of the early development of AMAK, the National Federation of Women's Clubs.[482] The narrative traces the early successes and challenges of AMAK from its inception at the National Women's Conference in 1977, two years before independence, to its formal establishment as an independent non-government organisation in 1982. The chapter concludes with a discussion on its eventual collapse in 1995. In the context of post-independence Kiribati, this chapter examines AMAK's transition from a government-based entity within the Colonial administration to an independent body propped up by external funding and particularly technical assistance by the Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific (FSP).

Significant in this transition was the adoption of a new constitution for AMAK which was intended to ensure AMAK was representative and acted on behalf of all women's clubs in the newly independent nation. However, the new constitution caused great discontent among AMAK's members leading to its gradual fracturing along Church rivalries. AMAK's internal relationships with its members – the

[482] This Chapter is based on four key evaluation reports and interview analysis.

Homemakers' Clubs and Church-based groups – as well as the government are explored. This analysis draws parallels between Colonial and post-independence relationships. AMAK's relationship with its external funding agency, the FSP and its regional agenda, is juxtaposed with AMAK's relationship with its former Colonial administration.

After independence in 1979, AMAK continued to be seen as a remnant of the previous Colonial government and was viewed with suspicion by Church clubs. Despite progress made at national women's conferences in 1977 and 1982, AMAK was never fully embraced by its member clubs. The competing agendas of AMAK and the Church clubs caused rivalry and tension. This chapter explores the reasons for the collapse of AMAK. Building on Chapter 7, further evidence is provided of the strength and growing significance of the indigenised Church federations. AMAK played a crucial national role by shifting dependency from the Colonial administration to outside agencies for funding and support. However, this reliance on outside funding meant that Church federations were self-financed whereas AMAK, despite best intentions, was dependent on the FSP and was obliged to follow the FSP regional agenda. The withdrawal of funding by FSP in 1986 left AMAK weak. At the same time, despite the strong leadership of individuals within AMAK, the grassroots ownership of women's programs lay with the Church clubs.

In 1989, a UNESCO Report identified inadequate training of AMAK women in executive and managerial skills as a leading factor in the organisation's decline. The main source of training for I-Kiribati women post-independence continued to be the

CETC. Despite some changes in its curriculum after its founding in 1963, the CETC continued to adopt a welfare approach to development in its training courses. The events just prior and after independence suggest that the CETC's welfare approach was embraced by I-Kiribati women and men as it promoted women's development on the basic principle of building their capacity for their reproductive and domestic roles.

Interviews with women active in the independence era revealed that women viewed themselves as being in a gender dichotomy in which their roles were complementary to those of men (Chapter 4). Women interviewed rejected the label of feminism. However, while they denied associating their activities with any label of feminist actions, the events before and after independence suggest women's development in Kiribati from the 1960s to early 1980s can be viewed through an equity feminist lens for the purpose of this research. Equity feminism is the ideology that locates men and women as beings with equal potential, and therefore leads to the logical outcome of a belief that men and women should have equal opportunity and choice in life.[483]

As the CETC welfare approach was largely aligned with equity feminism, this approach to development sat comfortably with Kiribati men and women. As discussed in Chapter 5, CETC-trained community workers were well respected and acknowledged for their work as it was seen to benefit not only women, but their

[483] Moser, (1993), op. cit.

families and wider community. The CETC curriculum, when applied to the local Kiribati context, was beneficial to the women at the village and island level. However, as the 1989 UNESCO Report revealed, the CETC curriculum did not prepare women for the responsibilities of managing and directing a national mechanism with oversight of a wide range of women's programs. The UNESCO Report pointed to failings within the curriculum to provide the skills, training and capacity building required for the successful coordination of a national federation.[484] Due to the tensions and rivalry among the membership and fracturing along Church lines, the collapse of AMAK may very well have been inevitable. However, a consideration of the lack of stronger training opportunities regionally for women is needed.

Founding of AMAK

The pivotal outcome of the 1977 Women's Conference was the decision to establish a national Federation of Women's Associations. The Federation was to be called *Aia Maea Ainen* (AMAK) – the 'women's ring of friendship'. The goal was for AMAK to be a self-financed, non-government organisation. However, due to funding restraints, the national coordination of the women's interests program remained within government control and monitoring until an external funding source became available. In 1980, the newly formed Republic of Kiribati requested

[484] Kingstone, F. K. (1989) *Report on Social Development Advisory Services to the Government of the Republic of Kiribati, 4 – 17 March, 1989*, Port Villa, Vanuatu: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Pacific Operations Centre

the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific (FSP), which had previous experience working with women's programs in the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and Western Samoa, to support the withdrawal of AMAK as an agency of government and for it to be established as an independent body. The government requested the FSP to help facilitate and fund the establishment of a physical headquarters for AMAK in South Tarawa (staff offices and a *maneaba* at Bikenibeu) and to assist in reorganising it so that it would be representative of all women's clubs.

A criticism of the 1977 women's conference was that its delegates represented only the Homemakers' Club. [485] There was concern that the Church clubs had little input into how the National Federation would take shape. The government intended for AMAK to be an umbrella organisation for all women's clubs and to be a platform for social development programs that focused on women and the family. After consultation, the FSP put forth a program endorsed by the Kiribati government which was approved by the South Pacific Regional Development Office of the US Agency for International Development on 14 October 1981.[486] Funding was then made available to assist the transition. A part of the funding program was the appointment of FSP Adviser, Ms Kathy Nast, who had worked in the Solomon Islands. Nast arrived in Kiribati in November 1981. Her role was to work closely

[485] For example, any workshop or conference organised by the women's interest office only included members of the Homemakers' Clubs until constitutional changes were affected in 1982. See Nast, K. F. (1982) Third Quarterly Report, Women's Ring of Friendship, Republic of Kiribati, Period: June1 – August 31, 1982. 'A program to assist women in development programs in Kiribati', New York: The Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific, p 6

[486] Hosie, B. P (1982)First Evaluation Women's Ring of Friendship, Republic of Kiribati, Period: October 14, 1981 – July 31, 1982. 'A program to assist women in development programs in Kiribati', New York: The Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific, p iii

with AMAK in an advisory capacity but to stay in the background so as to 'give the Director the responsibility for administration and decision making'. [487] FSP's overarching role was to 'assist Kiribati development by working with the National Federation of Women to improve its effectiveness in integrating Kiribati women and their families in the development processes'.[488]

The Kiribati government had hoped that by strengthening AMAK, women's clubs could be utilised to address grassroots development issues and community education such as health. In particular, malnutrition had become a growing problem in the early 1980s. A 1978 study showed the infant mortality rate was 87 per 1000 live births as a result of poor nutrition, poor hygiene and uncontrolled number of births per family.[489] The government viewed AMAK as crucial in combating malnutrition and was 'anxious to build up a strong and effective organization'.[490] These issues tied in closely with the Regional Nutrition Program of the FSP, which explained the motivation and funding agenda behind FSP's involvement.

The re-organisation of AMAK was problematic from the outset. The First Evaluation of the FSP funding program of AMAK, conducted by Bernard Hosie, highlighted two key issues. [491] Firstly, the baseline data provided to FSP was flawed in that it over-exaggerated the number of members. Secondly, many members and clubs had

[487] Hosie, op. cit, p 13
[488] Nast, op. cit., p 1
[489] Hosie, op. cit, p iii
[490] ibid., p 11
[491] ibid.

formed in isolation along Church lines and had become disengaged from the government-sponsored structure that began in the 1960s. The original baseline data indicated that the National Federation of Women (AMAK) had over 13,000 active members across 200 clubs. This number represented 95% of the eligible women of adult age of Kiribati at the time. This was a vast over-exaggeration.

Table 1: Estimated Membership Figures 1981[492]

Homemaker's Clubs	2053
RAK	5200
Itoiningainan	4500
Tokiti (SDA)	220
Bahai	150
Church of God	170
TOTAL	**13,293**

Hosie observed that there seemed to be a, 'tendency for Churches to consider that all their women Church members belong(ed) to the Women's Club'.[493] For example, the Catholic Church estimated 4,500 members (see Table 1), however the Federation estimated 2,298 active members. The inflated membership numbers in the baseline data also skewed the predicted income AMAK would receive from member contributions. This contributed to an unrealistic expectation of AMAK to be self-funded once FSP departed.

[492] ibid, p 1
[493] ibid.

The conflict with Church-based groups; particularly the Catholic women who eventually refused to pay the membership fee, further compounded AMAK's financial issues and hindered progress towards the creation of an independent, self-financed body. Furthermore, the Evaluation Report revealed that active membership of the Federation included the Homemakers' Club members (estimated to form twenty percent of total membership) with the other eighty percent of members from Church-based clubs that were only loosely affiliated. The actual membership of the Federation was unknown, but was certainly below the 'official' figure (perhaps only a half).

There was also the issue of clubs disengaging from the Federation. Hosie reported that some, 'club Presidents with whom the Evaluator spoke considered that active membership had fallen considerably in recent years'.[494] Interviews conducted with key leaders (as discussed in Chapter 6 and elaborated on below) as well as reports commissioned by PACFAW, UNESCO, FSP and other international aid agencies confirm that the growth of Church-based clubs was largely responsible for the downfall of AMAK in 1995. In addition to increasing disengagement, there were also fierce divisions within the Federation. The Homemaker's Clubs considered that the Federation 'was theirs' which caused conflict with the Church clubs. Hosie observed 'In recent years there has certainly been an improvement but differences still remain'.[495]

---

[494] ibid., p 2
[495] ibid.

A triennial conference, facilitated by the FSP Adviser, was held in April 1982. Two key outcomes arose from the conference. Firstly, a new constitution was approved. The revised constitution endorsed AMAK to represent all women's clubs (not just the Homemakers'Clubs). As instructed by the government, AMAK was to be an umbrella organisation for all women's clubs in the Republic. The new constitution also stated that all decisions and access to funding needed to be directed through AMAK. This soon became a problem. Secondly, a new executive and director were elected and administrative support staff appointed. Despite this progress, uncertainty and tension remained. Church leaders (third wave women) were unsure of the relationship between AMAK and their Church-based clubs. For example, in the First Evaluation Report, Hosie described an incident where there was confusion over the use of the new *maneaba* at the national headquarters. Despite being the treasurer of AMAK, the Catholic Women's Club Director, Sr. Frances Ruatu, was not aware that Catholic women could use the *maneaba*.[496]

Protestant women expressed similar uncertainty about the relationship between their clubs and the Federation. Protestant women voiced their concern that AMAK may 'take over and the KPC (Kiribati Protestant Church) Clubs may lose their Church identity'.[497] The Church women also argued that their clubs should take precedence over AMAK and the Homemakers' Clubs, justifying that their women's fellowships had been active for longer. Quoting a member of the KPC, the First Evaluation Report noted, 'The KPC Clubs go back to the days of the early

[496] ibid., p 3
[497] ibid., p 2

missionaries and so are the oldest in the country. AMAK is very new and I am uncertain about how long it will last'.[498] This statement inferred that the Protestant clubs and by association, the Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC), were permanent institutions whereas the introduced women's interests program was potentially a temporary body. This statement also draws on the notion that the KPC, by 1982, had been totally indigenised.

Christianity and the sense of belonging to a Church and all the associated rituals that came with it, including membership of a women's fellowship, was an intrinsic part of everyday Kiribati life. In contrast, the notion of Homemakers' Clubs at village level, *Irekenrao* associations at island level and now the Federation of AMAK at national level were still viewed as 'new' and 'foreign' and as such, treated with a level of caution and suspicion. As Sr Frances Rautu explained, the Catholic and Protestant women's fellowships had 'strong roots'[499] before the introduction of government-sponsored clubs. AMAK was structured so that only clubs that were registered through AMAK were eligible for funding. This created a structure whereby Homemakers' and Church-based clubs functioned at village level and belonged to their respective *Irekenrao* at island level. At an individual level, this created pressures on members. Women were expected to fulfil any duties asked of them by their *Irekenrao* as well as by their Church club. Issues with this structure particularly impacted on the role of community workers trained at the CETC. Community workers were expected to work for AMAK as well as their Church. Sr.

---

[498] ibid., p 4

[499] Rautu, Sister F. (personal communication, March 20, 2008 (trans. Sr. Alaima Talu)

Frances Rautu, a CETC trained community worker and the Director of the *Teitoingaina* from 1978 to 1986, explained 'Even though engaged in (our) Church groupings, we are part of *Irekenrao*. So even if (we were) busy with Church groups, (we) could be sent by the *Irekenrao* to the Outer Islands to work with the women there'.[500] She described her relationship with AMAK in terms of a sense of obligation. She expressed a greater passion for her work for her Church.

Protestant women regarded AMAK in similar ways to their Catholic counterparts. AMAK controlled all available funding, both internally through the government as well as externally through aid agencies. The RAK was formalised in 1961 and by 1982 had developed a robust process of identifying the needs of its congregation and implementing a national program to address these. The national program was revised at the annual general meeting of the RAK. Funding was needed in order to deploy the national program, which mirrored that of the Colonial government sponsored women's interests program of the 1960s and 1970s, whereby community workers travelled to Outer Islands to visit women's clubs and to train them in community health and home economics. The RAK was (and continues to be) self-financed by member contributions as well as fundraising efforts and small scale business ventures facilitated through the RAK headquarters such as sewing of school uniforms and the selling of handicrafts. Prominent RAK leader, Rita Tira, explained that in deploying the program, community workers 'need to visit each island three or four times (and this is) very costly. The Outer Island women pay for

[500] ibid.

half of the fare of the trainers. They contribute via string, salt fish, weaving etc. The trainers bring (their) own materials and the Outer Island women then pay for what they want to sew'. She stated that being self-funded was difficult to sustain, 'the RAK (is) surviving through our women and their contributions… (however)… we have continued financial problems'.[501]

Many Church leaders expressed resentment towards having to go through AMAK to access funding. This meant that Churches were obliged to pay a membership to AMAK. Prior to 1982, the Homemakers gave three cents per month towards the Federation whereas the Churches paid $50 a year (for an affiliate membership). The FSP and government had hoped that as AMAK's membership increased, the financial contribution raised through member's fees would help in covering the operational costs.[502] The financial impact on village women was not considered. In addition to pressures on community workers to serve both the government and their Church, village women were expected to contribute (either cash or through handicrafts) to both their Church-based club as well as to their island *Irekenrao* (AMAK).

The RAK and *Teitoingaina* had their own program separate from AMAK and resented having to go through AMAK to request funds. For example, in 1982, AMAK offered a Small Projects Program which provided materials for the setup of small scale projects such as vegetable gardens, the building of water catchments or

[501] Tira, R. (personal communication, March 16, 2009)
[502] Hosie, op. cit., p 10

small businesses such as selling of eggs, bakery, sewing, selling of dried fish, or handicrafts. The request could be no more than $200 and must demonstrate that it would 'benefit village, community or island by improving the life of the people'.[503] However, the clubs, in addition to membership fees, were required to contribute fifty percent of the cost of the project.[504] Rita Tira explained that the RAK as a central management agency, wanted funds to come directly to them so that they could implement their own projects.[505]

The change in the constitution of AMAK to be inclusive of all Kiribati women angered members of the Homemakers' Clubs. Prior to the new constitution, AMAK 'belonged' to the Homemakers' Clubs and therefore the AMAK associated clubs and members had advantages over the Church Clubs. The First Evaluation Report cited the President of South Arorae Clubs who, although generally positive about AMAK, stated, 'some Homemakers' Club members are not happy because they feel they have now lost control'.[506] As a result of these changes, Hosie remarked, in terms of the Homemakers, 'there will certainly be some reluctance to lose these advantages'.[507]

Tekarei Russell, who led AMAK in the early 1980s, reflected on this period and explained the tensions surrounding the change in the constitution. She recalled that when the Church groups wanted to be a part of AMAK, the government supported

---

[503] Nast, op. cit., p 2
[504] Hosie, op. cit., p 12
[505] Tira, R. (personal communication, March 16, 2009)
[506] Hosie, op. cit., p 4
[507] ibid.

this. To paraphrase Russell, the government needed to keep the Churches on side.[508] However, this upset many of the older women who did not want this to happen because they felt they had started AMAK and that it should remain exclusively with the Homemakers. Their reasoning was that there was 'nothing stopping the Church group members from joining'[509] as the Homemakers were non-denominational and open to all women regardless of faith. Drawing on the analogy of a husband and wife, Russell explained that because in Kiribati custom, wives were expected to submit to their husbands, AMAK, as the agency representative of women as good wives and mothers, should submit to the government, the husband and decision-maker of the family (Kiribati). Based on this reasoning, she agreed to the government's proposition.[510]

After assessing the tensions between members of AMAK and the consequences of the new constitution, the First Evaluation Report concluded that, 'what AMAK now needs is time to establish itself, to prove its value, and to prove its claim to be representative of all of the Clubs'.[511] The Report recommended that, in order for AMAK to make itself representative of all clubs, it must ensure all clubs are invited to training programs, not just Homemakers, it should explore the possibility of attaching a Church Extension Officer to AMAK teams working in the atolls, and offer Small Grants Programs to all Clubs and use the media, particularly the women's radio broadcast, to help communicate the new role of AMAK and the constitutional

[508] Russell, T. (personal communication May 23, 2007)
[509] ibid.
[510] Nast, op. cit., p 1
[511] Hosie, op. cit., p 4

changes.[512] The Report concluded, 'as AMAK becomes more united and effective, it will become more important politically, and more able to exercise its political muscle in seeking such support'.[513] In terms of AMAK being self-financed, 'a strong AMAK will be attractive to development agencies'. As a final note the Report advised that, 'the Clubs themselves, once they are convinced of the value of AMAK, will give greater support'.[514]

The resistance to AMAK's role as a national agency might also be explained by a long-standing antipathy between us and them or Tarawa and Outer Islands once Banaba and South Tarawa assumed pivotal roles in the Colonial administration. This reluctance might also be related to traditional, pre-colonial jealousies and conflicts between the southern and northern atolls, and by a general feeling that an atoll's affairs were autonomous and not subject to authority of another atoll or to rules and regulations sent down from a Colonial enclave.

Early successes of AMAK

Despite problems at the outset, AMAK did experience some moderate early success and benefitted from its relationship with the FSP. Within nine months of her arrival to Tarawa, FSP Adviser, Kathy Nast, reported the 'National Federation of Women (AMAK) is already proving to be an effective change and educational organization to

[512] ibid., p 5
[513] ibid., p 13
[514] ibid., p 13

promote a healthier lifestyle, not only for women, but for their entire families as well.'[515] Key progress included data collection on Outer Islands in regards to breastfeeding, weaning, family planning, nutrition, cooking, chicken care, sanitation and handicrafts. This data was then used to assess the needs of rural women in the Outer Island as well as urban Tarawa women and their families. Programs were then devised and deployed to address these needs. For example, in urban Tarawa, AMAK ran workshops on young women's programs and adaptation to the urban environment as well as the more welfare based programs of cooking of local foods and sewing demonstrations.[516]

On the Outer Islands, Women's Interest Workers provided training in nutrition, childcare, chicken care, sanitation, health and family planning and conducted demonstrations on the building of smokeless stoves and establishing vegetable gardens. This data collection contributed to greater regional knowledge on development needs of Pacific women. Furthermore, workshops encouraged women to critically assess their conditions, to identify problems impacting their status and to consider ways in which their situation could be improved. For example, the 1982 tour of Tamana Island reported a successful workshop with fifty-one women where the key points of how to raise the status of women 'to be equal to men', 'what creates problems in the family', 'problem solving' and 'what their main needs are' were discussed.[517] The workshops contributed to a growing self-

[515] Nast, op. cit., p 1
[516] ibid., p 6
[517] Tamana Island Report, Appendix to Nast, op. cit., p 1

awareness of the positive changes for women. In the 1982, Beru Island Report, the following commentary was offered:

> We were surprised when one woman brought up a topic on "How Women are more free" these days. They could see themselves attending different parties and forming their own organizations, when in the past they have nowhere to go but just beside the fire. Men are relying on women's thought(s) and are trying to find places for women where they could fill the spaces that are needed.[518]

Workshops conducted in Tarawa as well as the Outer Islands during this period also communicated to women the changes within AMAK. Outer Island reports indicated that much of the conflict between women's clubs stemmed from a miscommunication regarding the role of AMAK and its relationship with clubs. The Women's Interests Workers attempted to mitigate these tensions. The 1982 Beru Island Report offered a typical example:

> Women interested in topics, especially the connection between AMAK and other organizations but because… (they)… misunderstood, this is what kept some of them away. There were some conflicts during the meeting but we were glad our group managed to solve it. [519]

The Third Evaluation Report noted:

> Prior to 1982, workshops were held in the Outer Islands for members of the Homemakers' Clubs only; in 1982 under the Nation Women's Federation, workshop participants included: Homemakers' Clubs, women's clubs from the Catholic and Protestant Churches, Bahai Faith, Church of God, Assembly of God, Youth Clubs and Secondary School Students.[520]

In addition to expanding access to workshops to Church-based groups, the new direction of AMAK encouraged different community stakeholders to attend. For example, the 'workshops on the Outer Islands are being attended by women's club

---

[518] Beru Island Report, Appendix to Nast, op. cit., p 1
[519] ibid.
[520] Nast, op. cit., p 6

members, youth club members, school children, individual women, and in some cases, the husbands of the women'.[521]

As community workers had done in the 1960s and 1970s, Women's Interests Workers were eager to report instances where men showed an active interest or participated in workshops.[522] Village women were also seeing the benefits of including men in their development programs and were increasingly requesting that men be involved in lessons and training. This was particularly the case when it came to workshops on family planning,[523] as the women identified that many of the challenges they faced in adopting these practices lay with the men's attitudes.[524] Women's Interest Workers also reported 'that women are trying to blame their husbands'[525] but they had observed that in some cases this was just an excuse and Women's Interest Workers considered some women as 'lazy' by not wanting to engage in the workshops.[526]

Women's clubs were also encouraged to collaborate and work closely with the administration's formal structure of local government, known as Island Councils. A key example of this is the assistance of the Island Councils in helping to build smokeless stoves for the women. A health issue identified Pacific–wide was the problem of women cooking over an open fire which led to eye infections and other

[521] Nast, op. cit. p 3
[522] Letter to Coordinator Miss Kairabu Kamoriku, 30th June 1982, from Bakaka Village, Tamana Island Appendix to Nast, op. cit.
[523] For example, see Nikunau Island Workshop Report 1982 Appendix to Nast, op. cit., p 1; Arorae island Report 1982, Appendix to Nast, op. cit.
[524] Makin Report- 1982 Appendix to Nast, op. cit.
[525] Beru Island Report of 1982 Appendix to Nast, op. cit.
[526] ibid., p 1

problems. The building of smokeless stoves was a part of the CETC training to address this problem and was incorporated in Kiribati into the program of Women's Interests Workers tours of Outer Islands. In many instances, the Island Council worked with the women in the building of smokeless stoves. The 1982 Beru Island Report commented:

> It's an (exciting) thing to see some new members in some of the Clubs and hear that they've been doing something to improve their homes, villages and island by helping the Island Council in many ways they could offer themselves to help… The Island Council is motivated by the job that the Women Federation did to help their Island. The women again tried their very best to bring up their island.[527]

Despite the moderate success in slowly changing attitudes towards AMAK and encouraging a spirit of cooperation among women as well as within the community, funding remained an ongoing challenge for AMAK. USAID approved funding to continue the work of the FSP in 1983. However, AMAK knew this funding was only temporary and staff was 'particularly aware and concerned about AMAK's financial survival'.[528] As a part of FSP's technical assistance to AMAK, in addition to administrative and managerial support, in 1982 concerted efforts had been made 'to develop their fundraising capabilities'.[529] The newly constructed *maneaba* at Bikenibeu provided some form of income generation as the *maneaba* was hired out for cinema and island nights. AMAK staff were also available to be hired out as caterers for weddings and feasts and this money was donated back to the Federation.[530]

---

[527] Beru Island Report, Appendix to Nast, op. cit., p 1
[528] Nast, op. cit., p 7
[529] ibid.
[530] ibid.

AMAK encouraged a revival of traditional skills through a Handicraft Competition. The purpose of which was twofold, 'first, to encourage the making of several traditional handicrafts which (were) becoming a lost art in Kiribati; and second, to create a volume inventory of handicrafts, which can then be purchased for AMAK's handicraft store which raises money for the organization'.[531] By August 1982, AMAK had raised over $3,000 through club subscriptions and 'donations and fundraising projects (eg: hiring *maneaba*, selling meals at holiday functions, contract sewing and handicraft work and handicraft sales'.[532] Plans were underway to secure permanent and sustainable fundraising projects to cover the administrative and travel costs.[533] AMAK also received financial assistance as well as resources from the Associated Country Women of the World.[534] Despite its long term intentions to be a fully independent non-government organization, AMAK still received funding from the Kiribati government (for example $4,000 was received in 1982).[535]

While AMAK experienced some moderate success in the early years of its establishment, underlying issues remained. These challenges were predominantly the fracturing of AMAK along Church lines and ongoing financial struggles. The two were interconnected. The splintering of AMAK impacted its membership which in turn adversely affected its ability to raise funds via subscriptions.

---

[531] ibid., p 3
[532] ibid., p 7
[533] ibid., p 9
[534] ibid.
[535] ibid., p 7

A dispute over the payment of membership fees and alleged unfair representation led to the Catholic women withdrawing from AMAK at the Catholic Bishop's recommendation and with his approval. Catholic women felt that they should only be answerable to the Church and the Bishop, not AMAK. *Teitoingaina* wanted the freedom to be able to access funding without the allegedly restrictive conditions applied by AMAK. There was also the perception among Catholic women that AMAK favoured the Protestant women. One key informant who was a member of the KPC even acknowledged that 'AMAK (was) perhaps one-sided by not helping all the women during this time'.[536]

As Catholic women represented the highest proportion of women on Kiribati (see Table 1: Membership figures), the departure of *Teitoingaina* meant that AMAK was no longer the single central (or mother) organisation of all the groups and did not represent all of Kiribati. It also meant that half of its potential earnings through membership subscriptions would not be forthcoming. As the Colonial and then newly independent government had insisted that the Church clubs be a part of AMAK, they were highly critical of AMAK for its failure to unify all of the women.

After a decade of tension and debate over the payment of membership fees, which saw the Catholic women intermittently rejoin and again leave and then engage with AMAK but refuse to pay membership fees, AMAK eventually collapsed and the government re-absorbed the functions of the women's interests office. As one key

[536] Anon Note: Interviewee preferred anonymity

informant described, 'they (AMAK) stood and they fell and they stood and they fell'.[537] While AMAK was reformed the following year, it remained a quasi-governmental organisation and was not able to achieve financial or political independence. AMAK remains today in the difficult situation of needing to adhere to the government agenda in order to remain a recipient of funding while at the same time, attempting to advocate and lobby for the interests and rights of women.

A further reason for the failure of AMAK was that it was dependent on CETC graduates who were trained through regional programs that only focused on women's domestic roles. The CETC curriculum did not offer training courses which would build the leadership and managerial skills required to successfully manage a federation at national level. A UNESCO Report of 1989 explained:

> Thus Aia Maea Ainen Kiribati (AMAK) was born but unfortunately, before personnel were given appropriate and relevant training to ensure permanent efficient functioning of that national organisation. Staff personnel appointed to run AMAK were in the main trained in domestic/community-oriented programmes. None had development planning experience or background, as all their training had concentrated on the execution of an established syllabus and curriculum provided by the Community Education Training Centre (SPC), Suva. Basic administration and middle or senior management training was not part of that course.[538]

The UNESCO Report expanded:

> For Kiribati women to feel that they have failed is wrong because the system needs to be re-examined to see where the women of Kiribati need to be helped to be ready for such a piece of introduced concept. For besides the non-government national women's machinery, there are also the national groupings of Kiribati's seven Churches. Today, they are very influential institutions even alongside government and the *maneaba* system. It is the

[537] Anon Note: Interviewee preferred anonymity
[538] Kingstone, (1989), op. cit., p 4

> Church-based groups in fact, especially the two most prominent in the country – Protestants and Roman Catholics – which have greatly influenced the widening of the gap between the various Church women's groups.[539]

The UNESCO Report highlights two significant factors which contributed to AMAK's downfall. Firstly, the Report identified inadequate training at a regional level through the CETC curriculum as a primary cause which was exacerbated by the fracturing of the federation along Church lines. The latter has been discussed in Chapter 7. Secondly, the Report identified the role and strength of the Church groups in competition to AMAK as central to its failures which has been discussed in the foregoing. Ultimately, AMAK failed as a result of sectarianism.

Shortcomings of AMAK

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the impact on AMAK of the Colonial legacy of the women's interests program during the 1960s to 1980s. In pursuing their program for women's development, the aim of the Colonial administration was to foster the development of women using a framework based on a welfare approach. The administration did not conceive of its program in terms of the rights of women but rather in terms of developing the self-sufficiency and sustainability of the Colony by strengthening women's capacity to fulfil their domestic roles. The central plank of this development model was community education projects at the village level. This approach to women's development was underpinned by Christian ideology and encouraged women to be good mothers and wives. The Colonial

[539] ibid., p 3

government's implementation of a welfare approach was influenced by the content of the regional CETC curriculum.

From 1963 to the early 1980s, the CETC curriculum underwent minimal change and continued to focus on providing community education at the village level. The core objective of the CETC remained as 'training people in method of community education so that by working together they may achieve better living conditions for themselves, their families, their communities and their nations'.[540] The CETC continued a welfare approach towards its curriculum throughout this period. The Kiribati government was comfortable with this approach as it focused on development programs that centred on women's domestic and reproductive roles. While the CETC training encouraged women to challenge 'bad' aspects of custom, it did so while reinforcing their roles as mothers. This training model, descending from CETC to the Colonial administration and finally to AMAK, aligned with traditional gender roles and was accepted within communities and women's perceptions of themselves and their roles.

A common finding from interviews, when the roles of men and women were discussed, was a predominant focus on men and women working together as a cohesive unit. This is indicative of the gender orientation known as gender complementarity. The gender roles perpetuated by I-Kiribati men and women are similarly indicative of gender complementarity and the following overview of those

[540] Kwain, (n d), op. cit., p 64

roles is provided as an explanation for why the welfare approach was successful. While the gender role descriptions are generalisations they help to understand the women's perceptions of themselves and their place in society.

The traditional (pre-European contact) role of I-Kiribati women focused, as portrayed in the dominant readings of histories of Kiribati, on the domestic functions of a wife and mother. I-Kiribati women's duties included child-rearing, cleaning, cooking, weaving mats, collecting shell fish at low tide and organising compost for *babai* (root crop) plants[541] and complemented that of the men, as the men were the providers and head of the family and built and maintained the family house, fished, cut toddy (fermented coconut sap), collected coconuts and cultivated *babai* plants.[542] These gender roles were further entrenched during missionary contact and have become institutionalised within the indigenised Churches.

The welfare approach aligned with Christian teaching as those values also perpetuated the separation of gender roles, encouraging women to be 'good wives and mothers' and supported a gender complementary perspective. As one female participant explained her Catholic faith meant that 'regardless of gender or sex the gravity of sin (was) all the same'.[543] And in the words of a Protestant woman, these gender divisions were a 'part of Christian life' and that in a marriage, the husband and wife 'respect (each other) …. as equals in different aspects of life'.[544]

---

[541] Talu, (1992), op. cit. p 178
[542] Kamoriki, (1976), op. cit. p 1
[543] Baiteke, I. (personal communication, May 22, 2007)
[544] Tira, R. (personal communication, March 16, 2009)

This participant explained that the division of gender roles was not to be seen as a husband oppressing a wife. Rather, in Kiribati society, men and women performed separate roles and valued and respected each other's contributions to the overall family.

Throughout the interviews also when the roles of men and women were discussed, the women strongly rejected Western feminism as an appropriate descriptor of their activities and were reticent to be typecast as breaking with custom even when their membership of AMAK or participation in women's interests initiatives meant they could be seen to be working to introduce change. The women in interviews gave the impression they recognised that some elements of custom had negative consequences and, as discussed in Chapter 6, they worked to improve those aspects of their own role. However, for this to be successful and accepted by the community (men and women), women needed to do so gradually and negotiate the changes in 'baby steps'.[545] In wider Pacific feminist discussions, Vilsoni Hereniko observed:

> Many Pacific women have embraced Western feminism in their search for a cultural and gender identity which is free of both foreign colonialism and indigenous male oppression... The trend is noticeable among Island women in Hawai'i, Fiji, and Guam. On the other hand, in Tonga and Samoa there appears to be a strong anti-feminist movement among women intellectuals, or at least a tendency to reject established feminism because of its primary association with white, Western, middle-class women'.[546]

[545] Anon Note: Interviewee preferred anonymity.
[546] Hereniko, (1997), 'Pacific Cultural Identities;, in The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders', Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp 436-7

Participants made a distinction between 'women's lib' (the term used most commonly to refer to Western notions of feminism) and what was considered 'women's work' in Kiribati. Comments in Kiribati such as 'Here we don't hate our men, we love our men' implied an assumption that indirectly Western feminists were in a gender war with men and that I-Kiribati women saw themselves as separate from this Western ideology. As one participant explained:

> because of my understanding, I don't believe in discriminating of women and men, I thought it whatever men and women do, they always work together for the welfare of the family. That was the way I (was) brought up…I know that they are men but to me we're the same. So the career that they did, I think I can do it too. It never came to my understanding that we are different except that…you know…he's a boy. I'm a girl. That's all.[547]

While the statement above demonstrates that women rejected 'labels' or typecasts of feminism, from an outsider perspective, their self-descriptions could be seen as 'equity feminism' in which both sexes are seen as having equal potential. On the other hand, the women's understanding of Western feminism could be inferred as gender feminism which is an ideology that sees men and women as antagonistic with the primary aim of liberating women from the traditional control of men. Throughout the interviews I identified instances which to an *i-matang* researcher seemed to be clear instances of institutionalised discrimination against women, especially in regard to education and employment opportunities. On probing this, I was told, 'because I never look at it (that way)…to me a person is a person….I sit amongst the men, they talk, I talk … to me (it's) just the same'.[548]

---

[547] Anon Note: Interviewee preferred anonymity
[548] Anon Note: Interviewee preferred anonymity

Equity feminism has been linked by Moser as one of the underlying principles influencing the welfare approach to development.[549] The synergy between equity feminism and I-Kiribati women's self-perceptions in terms of gender complementarity helps to explain the ready adoption of the welfare approach supported as it was by the CETC curriculum. As previously noted, the CETC curriculum targeted development in Kiribati society by promoting community education for women at the grassroots level. In terms of the development of women, other than one off workshops or conferences, the CETC provided the sole source of training and education for women involved in women's work.

The implications for AMAK, however, were that the focus of the CETC on welfare based programs meant that I-Kiribati women in this space notably lacked access to training in other areas such as management, micro-finance, small-business, office skills, and other administrative skills. As the 1989 UNESCO Report highlighted, the CETC curriculum was notably lacking in the training and education of managerial, administrative and leadership skills that were needed to successfully take over ownership of an independent national mechanism for women's development.

Internationally, 1985 saw the end to the United Nations Decade for Women and as a result, the regional funding agenda shifted away from women's issues. As one participant noted, 'women were no longer the hot topic'[550] and so funding became hard to attract. In order for AMAK to access external funding, they needed to

---

[549] Moser, (1993), op. cit.
[550] Anon Note: Interviewee preferred anonymity.

implement the agendas of outside agencies that were too radical for an essentially conservative society. I-Kiribati women in the 1980s instead looked backwards and remained comfortable with the welfare approach to development of the 1960s and 1970s.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the emergence through international aid agencies of development programs that attempted to expand women's rights into traditionally male spaces (such as women in politics) was problematic and in the context of a recently decolonised new nation, typically localising and led by an emergent elite of males, this was not possible. For example, AMAK attempted to implement a 'women in politics' program but this was shut down by conservative male members of the newly independent government.

Concluding remarks

In comparing the history of AMAK over the Colonial and post-independence periods, the primary conclusion to be drawn is that the eventual failure of AMAK was its inability to garner the support of the diverse communities of members it was created to serve. This was compounded by the growing strength of the now indigenised Church federations which ultimately led to the fracturing of AMAK. The executive and staff of AMAK, trained through the CETC, were also not adequately trained to take on management and administration of a national non-government

organisation. This was an inherent flaw in wider regional development approaches as evidenced by the CETC curriculum.

The major objective of the AMAK program under the FSP had been 'to address the more general problems of poor social and economic conditions, poor nutrition and hygiene, (and) high birth-rate'[551] and to achieve this, the FSP's plan focused 'on the support of the National Federation of Women'.[552] Similarities can be drawn from the Colonial government's objectives in the 1960s of using the network of women's clubs for community education and social development. This framework was initiated in the 1960s to enable a sustainable avenue for social development at the village level in the postcolonial period. The women's interests framework established during the decolonisation period was continued, as intended by the former Resident Commissioner V. J. Andersen.

The 1977 Women's Conference had seen a willingness of I-Kiribati women to shift away from British assistance and the Conference marked a turning point in I-Kiribati women's ownership of the introduced women's interests movement. However, the years immediately after independence merely saw dependency shift from Britain, the Colonial master, to an international aid agency, the FSP. Furthermore, after 1979, rivalry along Church lines continued. In an economic environment with scarce opportunities and limited resources (the UN had listed Kiribati as one of the least developed nations globally), access to the already limited funding resulted in

[551] Hosie, op. sit., p 3
[552] ibid.

tensions and competition. This crippled attempts to unify Kiribati women under one national umbrella organisation. Rather, women thrived within their own Church structures. The growth of the Church-based clubs caused fractions within the AMAK structure. In particular, Catholic women continued to see the government-sponsored clubs and AMAK as 'Protestant'. As a result, the Catholics largely excluded themselves from the organisation. With over fifty percent of the population registering as Catholic, AMAK was not representative of all of the Kiribati women and this had funding implications as AMAK. By 1995, AMAK, facing tremendous financial struggles and failing to unify all women of Kiribati, was absorbed by the government.

The collapse of AMAK can also be attributed to a deliberate, but what may be acknowledged also as an imposed national and regional focus on a welfare approach to women's development. The reliance on the CETC curriculum was a double helix, nurturing women and providing a vital regional linkage, but not providing women with the necessary skills required to take over ownership of the national mechanism for women's development. Furthermore, strong synergisms between the welfare approach, traditional gender roles and underlying Christian values reinforced women's place in development programs as 'mothers and wives'. This left a vacuum whereby steps to move beyond viewing women in the private to the public sphere were met with fierce resistance. The Colonial period up to 1979 had witnessed significant progress in terms of women's interests and development at island and village level, however, the step from Colony to nation was wracked with contradictions and unresolved responsibilities as the Church and secular

demands confronted women wanting to be both I-Kiribati, and modern. As one participant explained, 'us women run before we can walk'.[553]

[553] Anon Note: Interviewee preferred anonymity.

Chapter 9

Waves for change –

reflections on the impact of the women's interests movement

This thesis has created a space for women in the history of the decolonisation of the Gilbert Islands. The Colonial government's preparations for independence sparked the early development of women's interests but, until now, little attention has been given to women's voices in the written histories of decolonisation in the Gilbert Islands. This thesis has provided the first history and interpretation of the Indigenous women's interests movement, as it impacted the Gilbert Islands, during the 1960s and 1970s. It offers a narrative of the movement in terms of three overlapping waves of women leaders. This is a novel framework that could be applied to further historical analysis of women's groups in other Pacific nations.

An interrogation of sources reveals the I-Kiribati women played a role and actively contributed to development of the Colony during the period of decolonisation, although not in the manner planned by colonial policy. The Colonial government had planned a three stage approach to implementing a women's interests program and the first two stages successfully created a network of local village clubs and island associations but unintentionally strengthened local Church-based women's programs. As a result, the final national organisation stage was the least successful,

due to the competition from two competing Church structures. By the late 1970s, however, a national women's interests program had been deployed, if not exactly along government lines.

The archives interrogated for the analysis underpinning these findings were largely produced by the Colonial Office. Sources within the archives documented the web of communication and correspondence between the Women's Interests Office and international organisations, regional bodies, Colonial government departments and offices, community workers, Island Councils and local women's clubs. At an international level, sources within the archives revealed a gradual shift in reliance for funding and technical assistance from the United Kingdom to regional bodies. In the Pacific context, the archival and interview sources showed Kiribati women's growing understanding of development, gender and decolonisation, particularly as members of a wider Pacific identity. Nationally, women were active in implementing the Colonial (and later post-independence) social development agendas.

A key conclusion from the archival material and interviews of key participants in South Tarawa was that women's interests movement resulted in significant benefits for grassroots village women. This thesis contributes to the historiography of women in the GEIC through reflections on urban women's experiences. A key conclusion is that the women's interest movement in the urban areas resulted in

significant benefits for grassroots village women but further research is needed to elaborate more fully on the experiences of Outer Island women.

Overview of findings

The British Colonial administration's preparations and plans for decolonisation have been conceptualised in this thesis as a three stage approach to women's development in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. This approach was designed to develop a network of women's clubs at village, island and national level. The leadership of the women's interests movement is presented as three overlapping waves. The first wave was instigated by the Colonial administration and gained momentum with the leadership of border-dweller Gilbertese women supported by expatriate women (particularly Mrs Cordon, the wives of government officials such as Elaine Bernacchi and nuns). Trickling down from the South Pacific Commission's regional agenda for women's betterment, border-dweller Gilbertese women implemented a Colonial policy aimed at advancing women's informal education through the establishment of a network of women's clubs. The Colonial administration, recognising the prominence of the Church in Gilbertese society, particularly with respect to education, successfully leveraged the Church to assist in this process.

Based on the regional SPC model, and underpinned by a welfare approach towards women's development, the first wave of women negotiated their border-dweller

status and took advantage of their relationships with expatriates to successfully lay the foundations of a formalised structure for a Colony-wide women's interests program. A significant outcome of this was the initial participation of women in politics through representation on the Advisory Council and later, the Legislative Council. Border dwellers gained a voice in national politics in the context of decolonisation and became role models for future waves of Gilbertese women. Their impact was enhanced because they were able to speak in public and be heard at a time when customary restrictions would not have allowed a Gilbertese woman to do so. Sanctioned and encouraged by the Colonial administration, the presence and active participation of women in the public realm became increasingly normalised. In this context, border-dweller women broke down gendered boundaries. Through their uncustomary behaviours, they gained some cultural acceptance for women's voices and were able to challenge some traditionally patriarchal spaces. Using their status as Gilbertese but 'not a real Gilbertese', these border-dweller women were able to negotiate 'old' and 'new' social and cultural structures and mechanisms to the benefit of women and their families.

The second wave of women emerged as a result of increasing opportunities for the education of girls within the Colony (1913 - first Protestant School for Girls, 1955 – first Catholic school for girls, 1959 - first government school for girls). These women initially worked with and were influenced by the first wave of women. As 'real' Gilbertese women with a higher educational status, they were able to negotiate a leadership position within traditional Gilbertese society. They shared the following

common characteristics – all had been educated at either a Church-based or government girls' school; had experience abroad; most came from a prominent family (for example the daughter of a pastor or catechist, or government official); most were single and were either divorced, widowed, never married, or a nun. As such, they experienced a level of freedom not permitted to a married or even young single woman. However, some of these women, despite their non-marital status, were able to appreciate motherhood and experience the raising of a family through adoption. The second wave of women altered the definition of customarily acceptable behaviour by respected women within the community. They gained this acceptance and respect from their family's position and their Church association. This period marked the beginning of a formalised approach to women's interests through a village-level network of non-denominational women's clubs. As a result, local leaders emerged but border-dwellers continued to play a significant role in influencing the second wave of women. This period also marked strengthened communication between women's groups as newsletters and radio facilitated the dissemination of information within the network of clubs.

The success of the women's interest movement in South Tarawa at the village and island level was largely fostered through the training undertaken by second wave women at the Community Education and Training Centre (CETC) based in Fiji. Another supporting element was the SPC's Pacific strategy for 'progress in the Pacific', particularly for women's betterment in the context of decolonisation as well as religious affiliation. The third wave marked the beginning of the

indigenisation process of women's interests in the Gilbert Islands. Regionally, the process of indigenisation of Christianity was occurring throughout the Pacific. The indigenisation of the Churches cemented Christianity as intrinsically a part of Pacific or in this case, Gilbertese identity, and a legitimate part of Gilbertese custom, development, leadership and decolonisation.

The third wave period saw a shift from the initiative and direction of Colonial policy (based on a network of non-denominational clubs) to the prominence of Church-based clubs. The strength and formalisation of the Church-based clubs, albeit along two distinct lines, ultimately undermined the intentions of the Colonial administration to develop non-denominational clubs for each village. As a result, leadership of, and authority within, the movement continued to shift away from the expatriates and border-dwellers. Nuns, as office holders, were also gradually replaced by lay women. However, these changes created new problems. Despite the success of the Church-based clubs, tensions emerged between the Catholics and Protestants as well between Church-based clubs and the non-denominational clubs. As community education became increasingly accessible, there was also a reassertion of 'old' power with the return to prominence of pastor's and catechist's wives as leaders at village level. By the mid-1970s, the women's interests movement had been appropriated by Gilbertese custom and social processes, and rather than create something new, imposed and modern, it ended up being assimilated in the social structures that existed prior to the 1960s.

By 1982, with the establishment of AMAK, women in Kiribati had created a national movement, with corresponding organisation and exemplar leaders, and had gained much from the previous years. However, the collapse of AMAK in 1995 demonstrates that I-Kiribati women were not sufficiently trained to manage a national, unified, central organisation. The strength of the Church clubs continued post-independence and their prominence undermined attempts to form a secular national federation of women's clubs. AMAK failed to reach its potential because of the tensions and rivalries stemming from the prominence of the Church federations as well as underlying inadequacies in regional training opportunities for Kiribati women. This resulted in a lack of financial and membership support. AMAK was never able to fulfil its mission to become an independent body and eventually became absorbed by the government, later attaining a quasi-governmental organisation status.

This pointed to a critical flaw in women's development programs adopted by regional women's training centres (namely the CETC). The foundation of the women's interests program in Kiribati was dependent on the CETC curriculum which focused solely on women's roles within the domestic sphere. This approach resonated with I-Kiribati women's deep-rooted attitudes and aligned with traditional notions of gender complementarity and Christian teachings of gender roles. The welfare approach, while beneficial at the village level, was not sufficient in developing the relevant skills needed to successfully manage and coordinate an umbrella organisation encompassing all women's programs post-independence. In

fact, development literature that emerged in the 1980s was highly critical of the welfare approach. For example, Schoeffel argued that:

> Home economics training in the South Pacific is Eurocentric and, from the perspective of some Pacific island cultures, sexist, and this is true of the courses offered in regional training institutes down to grass roots level.[554]

A Eurocentric approach to women's programs based on a welfare approach and solely focused on advancing women through their reproductive roles suited I-Kiribati custom and expectations. Schoeffel is also critical of the emphasis placed on the incorporation of imported, processed ingredients such as flour, sugar and powdered milk in cooking training.[555] The dependency on these imported foods continues in contemporary Kiribati and anecdotal evidence indicates the high dependency on these goods, as well as rice, has contributed to the growing health concerns related to high rates of obesity and diabetes. Schoeffel also points to the high cost of imported goods. In the same 1986 article by Schoeffel, under a photo of a Pacific woman in front of a sewing machine, there is the caption 'Sewing class, is this "progress" for women?'.[556] This criticism downplays the potential earning capacity that skills such as sewing and the baking of scones for sale create for women. Home economic training had a profound impact for individual women by creating opportunities to access the cash economy. While the welfare approach failed to create a cohort of women capable to manage a national organisation, it was successful in delivering significant improvements and benefits for women, significantly at the village level. By teaching a woman how to sew, provide clothing

[554] Schoeffel, op. cit., p 36
[555] ibid.
[556] Schoeffel, op.cit., p 38

for her own family, reduce household costs, or earn a modest profit, these incomes, although small, provided a buffer from an economy dependent on a fluctuating copra market. In a society whereby men largely controlled the family's expenditure, it also provided access to a level of financial independence for women. For example, through the skills developed, a woman could use the money from her sewing to contribute to her children's school fees, thereby alleviating some of the financial pressure on the family. In a nation with limited employment opportunities, especially for women, the impact of any training that had the potential to provide financial gain, albeit small, is not to be undervalued.

Image 17: Members of *Teitoingaina* sell handicrafts, shell jewellery and clothing at a stall in Bairiki, South Tarawa 2008

Similarly, development literature has largely ignored or undervalued the impact of basic welfare improvements in the home. Findings from the 1960-1980 period suggests that for a grassroots woman living in an insular, isolated atoll, the community education programs offered through the women's interests movement provided considerable benefits. Further quantitative research needs to be conducted to provide definitive data on the impacts of these community education programs. However, Outer Island reports and letters to the Women's Interests Office together with anecdotal evidence suggests that a direct outcome of adult education and knowledge transfer through community workers was that grassroots women were able to improve their living standards. For example, the physical surroundings of their homes were improved through the introduction of smokeless stoves, establishment of vegetable gardens and the raising of chickens. Women were also educated in nutrition, family planning, sanitation, hygiene and child rearing. These projects contributed to improved living standards, better health and food security.

Community education offered village women access to knowledge to help them understand and adapt to their changing environment. In a society undergoing rapid change through introduced food products, concentrated urbanisation in South Tarawa, growing reliance on a cash economy and overpopulation, women's clubs became the conduit for adult education. The 1968 Report to the Resident Commissioner noted that, 'women are in many ways are the most closely affected

by the changes which have occurred in the Colony'[557] and that 'at a deeper level the role of women is under-going a change…their children are being educated and a woman's view of her own status is beginning to alter'.[558] Importantly, the Report noted 'membership in a women's committee or club is part of this change'[559] and argued for women's clubs to be supported in their role as change agents.

Generally, development literature also fails to consider the sense of community, the shared consciousness of participation and the excitement of adopting new gender roles created by the women's clubs. These clubs also widened individual women's horizons and developed individual women's sense of place beyond their family and village. During the period of decolonisation, they gradually came to see themselves as part of a national group, be that of the Homemakers' network or their Church. This development of a national identity was a significant change from the period prior to the 1960s when an individual identified with their genealogy and the home of their lineages. The remoteness and isolation of the atolls, which now form the Republic of Kiribati, fostered a sense of insularity. The development of women's groups and the communication between the groups facilitated colonial attempts to create a nation, by aiding the colonial administration's attempts to create a sense of cohesion among disparate island and atoll people. Similar colonial efforts were made throughout the Pacific, often attempting to merge peoples of vastly different ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as occurred with the

[557] McCreary and Boardman, op. cit. 32-33
[558] ibid
[559] ibid

formation of GEIC. As Tuvalu's separation from the GEIC and long-running Banaban agitations reveal, moving from the GEIC to an independent nation was a complex process.

The consolidation of women in Kiribati and the development of a sense of unity was fostered by the wider Colonial strategies to engage women in development programs in the Colony through the creation of a network of women's clubs. Attempts to break down geographical barriers, through Outer Island tours, newsletters and radio programs, helped to build a sense of unified identity by building , a 'women's ring of friendship'. Although the embodiment of this national women's ring of friendship, AMAK, ultimately failed to achieve the goal envisaged for it as the national umbrella organisation for women's interests, the aims of the women's interests program continued to unite women at a national level under the auspices of the Church federations.

Women's clubs also contributed to a growing political consciousness amongst women. This played out over two levels. Women's clubs were, firstly, increasingly seen to be collaborating with Island Councils on community projects and secondly, women mobilised through the women's club network to participate in national elections. This is best illustrated with the election of Mrs Tekarei Russell. Despite misunderstandings, which resulted in the failure of Mrs Russell to be re-elected in 1978, the fact that a woman was elected in the first ever Colonial elections is significant in itself and evidence of a growing sense of political maturity.

Through involvement in clubs, women were exposed to a life outside their immediate kinship group. Women were exposed to ideas and interactions with their counterparts beyond their village throughout the atolls. The insular experiences which were typical of women living on the atoll were transformed in a very short time. Women were now able to travel within Kiribati to attend meetings, training and workshops and to South Tarawa for conferences. Some women were able to travel abroad to share experiences with women across the world and to access greater educational opportunities. In the decolonisation era, women's clubs not only created a growing sense of a national identity but also fostered a sense of belonging to a wider Pacific community of women. This has now been acknowledged historically.

The shift in attitudes allowing women to travel abroad for educational and training opportunities and to attend regional workshops and conferences is also significant. In 1961, Katherine Tekanene had to overcome substantial challenges in order to be allowed to travel abroad to represent Colony women. By independence in 1979, women travelling unchaperoned to conferences, meetings and workshops abroad had become a normal feature of being a community worker. However, the number of women for which overseas travel was available was limited. In practice, it was the same five women who represented the Colony on each occasion and had opportunities for networking through international and regional channels. This practice of sending the same cohort of delegates to conferences has been identified as a regional issue. Suliana Siwatibau argued that throughout the Pacific, 'training opportunities, when available to women, are often utilized by the same individuals;

there are difficulties with training women innovators, given the Pacific's cultural setting in which they have to work'.[560]

The same observation can be applied to leadership opportunities at the village and island level within the club structure. In terms of women who became office bearers, it was typically the pastor's or catechist's wife, who was the most educated within the village and most respected because of her husband's position. These women were the ones who attended the Island Associations and had access to further developmental opportunities and attendance at meetings and workshops in South Tarawa. This bias reflected the pre-existing social hierarchies.

The developments triggered by the implementation of a Colonial policy for the growth of women's interests has been conceptualised in this thesis as involving successive waves of Gilbertese women in the implementation of a nationalised women's interests program. The evidence reveals the transition from individual champions to a collective ownership of the movement which, by the end of the 1970s had become embedded through a process of indigenisation within the Gilbertese social and Church structures. Chronologically, this illustrates a shift over time from an externally conceived and driven colonial strategy for women's development to an Indigenised women's interests movement led and coordinated by Gilbertese women.

[560] Siwatibau, op. cit., p 98

Further research

This research was narrowly focused in terms of the limited number of perhaps twenty or thirty I-Kiribati and expatriate women, who took up leadership roles in the Homemakers, Women's Interests, AMAK and Church groups. The depth of the interviews provided an extremely rich source of data on these women's personal accounts of key events, which was complemented by primary archival records. The combination of these perspectives enabled the generation of this historical analysis. This thesis can also be positioned within a global analysis of decolonisation. It then assumes a much broader significance as a reminder that in all the decolonising colonies in the Pacific from the first regaining of independence in 1962 to the 1980s women were active in regional and colonial developments towards independence. Extrapolating from the example of Kiribati and as evidenced by the South Pacific Commission's archives, women in Samoa, Cook Islands, Nauru, Tonga and Fiji, whose contributions in the literature are notably absent, also played important roles. Women were influential in a triple headed series of changes across the Pacific - rising women's consciousness of their roles, the creation of new elites as nations were formed, and social and economic development as new nations responded to global initiatives or reshaped initiatives started by their former colonial rulers. The different experiences of decolonisation and development need to be further examined. Do the waves for change identified in I-Kiribati reflect similar patterns in Tonga, Samoa, Hawai'i and New Caledoni? Why was it that women in Kiribati were organising their first national women's conference in 1977 with discussions focused around sewing, handicrafts, maternal and child health and child-rearing while in

Kanaky/New Caledonia, women like Dewe Gorodey were being imprisoned as a result of their strong political activism and women in Fiji were marching for a range of global issues and campaigns?[561] The contrast between the 1983 publication of Grace Mera Molisa's anti-colonial poetry in the Pacific literary journal *Mana,* with that of I-Kiribati female poet Katarina Everi, two decades later, is also a stark indicator of diverse Pacific experiences. Where Grace Mera Molisa referred to custom as 'misapplied/bastardised/ a frankenstein/ corpse/ conveniently/ recalled/ to intimidate/ women', Katarina Everi still revered the right of the '*Unimane* sit in the *maneaba*/ Making final decisions for our villagers/ While women weave sleeping mats'.[562]

The causes of these vastly contrasting experiences of decolonisation and attitudes towards custom of women may well lie in the different colonial histories, access to educational opportunities and diverse environments of the Pacific world. While the colonial history of the Gilbertese and British was one of a relatively peaceful relationship, that of the Kanak was one of volatility and warfare. While Kanak and ni-Vanuatuan women exploited access to opportunities of higher education (Gorodey attended university in France during the social upheavals of the 1968 Revolution and Molisa was the first ni-Vanuatuan woman to graduate from USP), the GEIC sent I-Kiribati women to be trained in home economics. While other Pacific women enjoy more resource-rich environments with constant access to fresh water and better food security, for the majority of Gilbertese women living in

[561] Gorodey, D. (2004) *The Kanak Apple Season: selected short fiction of Dewe Gorodey* Canberra: Pandanus Books
[562] Everi, op cit. p 5

the outer atolls, the isolation, remoteness and harsh environment meant that life was (and continues to be) a daily struggle. Although diverse in their motivation and subsequent experiences of women, these regional and local perspectives are valid and require further exploration and inclusion in histories of the Pacific.

The absence of women's voices from most of the historical accounts and established literature might be interpreted to imply that women played a minor role in the decolonisation process and that women were silent, passive non-actors amidst the changes. On the contrary, this research demonstrates that in at least the one case of Kiribati, women were not silent, not inactive. The active role women played in waves for change in I-Kiribati suggests that research is now needed on a broader historical front to rework the history of decolonisation in other Pacific nations and bring to historian's attention the simple fact that women were active. Although not active in ways that were photographed in London or inscribed on obelisks, women were so within their communities and Churches, in forming clubs, in selecting village and atoll leaders and, as elections were held for national parliaments, as national leaders.

A body of literature does exist on contemporary experiences of women's groupings in Melanesia. In 2003, the journal *Oceania* dedicated a special edition on this subject. Although that compilation was pivotal in that finally women's roles within clubs and associations, particularly women's religious fellowships, was acknowledged, generally there remains a dearth of literature inclusive of Pacific

women's regional experience in the 1960s and 1970s. An in-depth comparative study of the SPC's women's interests program across the Pacific region would fill this void.

The impacts of decolonisation also warrant further investigation, particularly with respect to changing attitudes towards custom and education on women at the village, island and national level. A social history of Outer Island women as well as Tuvaluan and Banaban women and their experiences of the decolonisation process would contribute to a broader historiography. This potential body of work would expand on the urban experiences of women in South Tarawa and the actions of the Churches, regional organisations and the Colonial Office as presented in this thesis. Furthermore, a longitudinal study of the overall impact of the colonial policy on attitudes and gender perceptions could potentially provide a greater understanding of challenges and barriers facing women today and could assist in the formulation of more practical and applicable development plans.

Contemporary issues

In contemporary Kiribati, development plans continue to appropriate women and women's networks to act as facilitators of change. Development plans target contemporary issues facing I-Kiribati women today, such as under-representation in the parliament and Island Councils, as well as the executive and managerial level; overpopulation and urbanisation of South Tarawa, particularly poor living

conditions in Betio as well as growing prostitution and HIV/AIDS concerns; health issues such as diabetes and obesity; unequal access to financial support and limited employment opportunities; as well as the adverse effects of the climate change.[563]

More recent reports sponsored by PACFAW, UNESCO, UNICEF and other non-government organisations indicate women are largely unaware of their legal rights and paint a dire picture of women and their status. Development agencies continue to work with AMAK to implement strategies to address these issues. For example, AMAK's Regional Rights Resource Team Officer provides legal advice and support for women; the Virtues Program, which targets strategies for addressing violence against women and small business seminars (in conjunction with sewing and cooking lessons which are a legacy from the welfare approach) are embedded in the training programs of the Women's Interests Workers (formerly known as community workers) who continue to work in the Outer Islands.[564]

The Church federations continue to work as facilitators of change for women and their families. The Protestant RAK has its own agenda but, as a member, continues to work within AMAK's development plans. Catholic women, despite ongoing

---

[563] See Tekanene, M (2004a). *Kiribati's Commitment to gender, equity, equality and empowerment: CEDAW implementation 2003*. Suva, Fiji: PACFAW; Tekanene, M. (2004b). *Kiribati status of women 2003*. Suva, Fiji: PACFAW; Tekanene, M. (2004c). *Kiribati's implementation of commitments to the Beijing and Pacific Platforms for action 2002-2003*, Suva, Fiji: PACFAW; United Nations. (1991). *The status of women in Kiribati*. Country Overview Paper for the South Pacific Seminar on the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

[564] Previously, community workers were largely based in South Tarawa and travelled to Outer Islands. In 1985, the responsibility for supporting the function of women's interests workers shifted to the Island Councils. Each island was responsible for the recruiting and financial support of a WIW who would be based on the island permanently. WIW continued to report monthly to AMAK and, despite funding from the Island Councils, the WIW largely served the interests of AMAK (see Roniti Teiwaki, (2002), The Women Interest Worker (WIW) in Kiribati, NZODA GAD Project).

tensions, continue to be affiliated with AMAK. The Church groups also act independently of AMAK in terms of mobilising for political action. For example, in 1995, led by the Church groups, women protested against the government's plans to send young I-Kiribati women to Hong Kong as domestic workers. The Church groups argued that this was a ploy to disguise human trafficking. Their activism was successful and the legislation was not passed.[565]

The emergence of the Kiribati Association of Non-Government Organisations (KANGO) has offered an alternative support for Church groups to access funding. KANGO acts as a conduit between local groups and international aid agencies and assists in the writing of proposals for and raising awareness of available grants. Both the RAK and *Teitoingaina* are members of KANGO and hence are able to access funds directly from external groups. Generally, the RAK choose to access funding through AMAK as a sign of respect of the hierarchy, whereas, due to ongoing tensions around membership subscription and alleged unfair representation, the *Teitoingaina* are more comfortable to by-pass AMAK and work directly with KANGO. Interestingly, KANGO is also represented in the National Council of Women which acts as the advisory council of AMAK. Despite the reported weaknesses of AMAK, the national federation was instrumental in lobbying the government to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2004. This was a monumental moment in the women's movement. Unfortunately, the momentum waned shortly after

[565] Anon

ratifying CEDAW. No reports were subsequently submitted to the United Nations until agitations from the Kiribati Women's Activist Network (K-WAN) secured resources through KANGO in 2009.

Through connections in KANGO, the *Nei Nibarara* group was formed in 2005. An initiative instigated by the Pacific Islands Trade and Investment Commission (PITIC) and supported by New Zealand Trade Aid, *Nei Nibarara* comprises 15 members of the RAK and 15 members of *Teitoingaina*. Regionally, the late 2000s witnessed a growing acknowledgement for the need to promote and rejuvenate traditional skills such as weaving and handicrafts. This acknowledgement of the significance of traditional skills aligned with an emerging overseas handicrafts market. The *Nei Nibarara* group produces handicrafts which are then sold through Trade Aid in New Zealand. The all-female *Nei Nibarara* group symbolises two key achievements in overcoming challenges that have hindered the effectiveness of women's development. Firstly, religious rivalry has tainted development efforts since the formation of AMAK in 1982 but the *Nei Nibarara* group has overcome this and demonstrates collaboration between the Church groups.

Secondly, access to international markets offered by the *Nei Nibarara* group provides a modest income for women who have otherwise little earning capacity. Knowledge has traditionally been seen as a sacred secret that stayed within the family and passed down from grandmother to mother to daughter (as the poem *Te Bwere* in Chapter 4 reflects). Interviews with women involved in *Nei Nibarara*

agreed that, as a result of urbanization and the breakdown of the extended family, traditional skills are slowly being lost. Weaving was noted in particular. The profits made from the selling of products abroad also offer an example to other women and, overall, promotes the application of traditional skills as a potential avenue for income generation.[566]

Legacies of the women's interests movement

The long standing legacy of the Colonial administration's women's interests policy was the establishment of organisational structures for the deployment of women's development programs that continue to employ community workers based on the Outer Islands. One-on-one training is still considered the most efficient development method in this remote and isolated nation. The legacy of the waves of women in leadership was to appropriate this organisation structure and redirect it within Church frameworks that worked for them. The government-sponsored network was seen as a Colonial imposition whereas, despite the Churches also being foreign- introduced institutions, by the 1980s, they had been indigenised and were seen as an intrinsic part of I-Kiribati life and identity. The legacy of the welfare approach had positive and negative ramifications. The welfare approach was easily absorbed and accepted by women as it aligned with their Christian teachings and perceptions of traditional gender roles. However, the approach became so deeply embedded that concepts outside the welfare approach, such as

[566] Nabatiku, Katimira (personal communication March 17, 2008); Williams, Aroita (personal communication March 12, 2008) (trans Sr. Alaima Talu)

women in politics, were met with reluctance from the women and strong resistance from the men.

The welfare approach also largely excluded men from the development process. Development literature suggests that, for gendered perceptions to change, particularly with respect to family planning and more recently, domestic violence,[567] men need to be engaged and educated as well. Having men involved creates shared ownerships and accountability over the problem being addressed. The 2003 Kiribati Status of Women Report noted, 'outreach programs should use an approach that encourages male participation as exclusion may result in lack of support for women issues.'[568] For the younger generation, at the island and village level, interviews revealed women's clubs post-independence have been losing their appeal. Women's clubs were more seen as being for old women and boring. Groups such as K-WAN attract younger, educated women as a result of their more progressive strategies towards women's development but this trend is largely restricted to urban areas.

Concluding remarks

This research demonstrates that women were agents for change. This change was not necessarily started by women, but once the colonial administration introduced

[567] A recent study showed that 68% of I-Kiribati women and children experience some form of domestic violence

[568] Tekanene, M (2004), op. cit.

the ideas, women tackled them with enthusiasm and often accommodated and absorbed them into existing customary frameworks. Women in Kiribati localised decolonisation. This research therefore opens up a whole new frontier of historical interpretation, revealing processes which up until now have been described in global terms without actually examining the grassroots scenario. Future questions that emerged from this research include examining the role of village women in steps towards self-government in other Pacific nations and whether the impact of the SPC's regional program for women's interest manifested similarly or differently in other former colonial territories. Equally historians know little about the ways in which women scattered across the vastness of the Pacific island nations acted for or against ideas that were being introduced from their newly created central governments.

The implementation of Colonial policy was initially successful at the village and island level. A national federation of women's clubs did emerge after independence. However, the strength of the Church-based clubs undermined this third stage of the Colony's plans. Another success was the indigenisation of the movement seen to be achieved by the third wave women as they assumed ownership of the women's interests programs within Church structures. In the context of the 1970s, as the Ellice Islands separated and the Gilbert Islands underwent a period of dramatic social, economic and political change, there was an underlying political significance in the growing public awareness of the role of women and their contribution, through their participation in national affairs and as

active agents of change in the decolonisation period. In Kiribati the women active in the Church groups, Homemakers' Clubs, and later AMAK were not passive participants, but were working towards the end of the GEIC in roles so far ignored by historians.

Image 18: *Nei Nibarara* women's group 2007, photograph courtesy of Hannah Page, Trade Aid, New Zealand

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Andersen, V. J. (1962). *Letter to Miss Marjorie Stewart, South Pacific Commission Women's Interests Officer from V.J. Andersen Resident Commission of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, 22 September*. Unpublished manuscript.

Aubry, T. (1979.) *Women speak out! A report of the Pacific Women's Conference, October 27 – November 2, 1975*

AusAID. (n.d.). *Guide to Gender and Development.* Retrieved 2 February 2009 from http://www.ausaid.gov.au

Awira, K. (1975, August). Women's page: A women's Interests Officer. *Atoll Pioneer,* p *6*.

Cleland, Lady Rachel (1963, October). Leadership training for Girl Guides in Papua and New Guinea. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 57- 58.

Clunies-Ross, E. (1968, First Quarter). Audio-visual aids course. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 41-43.

Cordon, R. (1968). Newsletter for January of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q. Bikenibeu, Tarawa.

Cordon, R., (1968). Newsletter for May of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa.

Cordon, R. (1968). Newsletter for June of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa.

Cordon, R. (1968). Newsletter for July of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs,H. Q. Bikenibeu, Tarawa.

Cordon, R. (1968). Newsletter for October of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa.

Cordon, R. (1968). Newsletter for November of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa.

Cordon, R. (1969). Newsletter for January of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa.

Cordon, R. (1969). Newsletter for February of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa.

Cordon, R. (1969). Newsletter for May of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa.

Cordon, R. (1969). Newsletter for June of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa.

Cordon, R. (1969). Newsletter for August of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa.

Cordon, R. (1970). Newsletter for April of the Colony Group of Homemakers' Clubs, H.Q., Bikenibeu, Tarawa.

Cordon, R. (1971, 21 January) quoted in *Colony Information Notes*, pp.5-6.

de Hollanda, H. (1964, April). Improving Nutrition at the Village Level. *South Pacific Bulletin*, p.44.

Eden, E. (1964, January). Training Centre for Home Economics. *South Pacific Bulletin*, pp.36-37.

Eden, E. (1966, Third Quarter). FAO Visits the SPC Community Training Centre, Fiji. *South Pacific Bulletin*, pp.55 – 56, 58.

Eden, E. (1969, Third Quarter). Home Economics Training Course. *South Pacific Bulletin*, p.20.

Eden, E. (1970, First Quarter). Home Economics for Community Work. *South Pacific Bulletin*, pp.46-47.

Eden, E. (1968, Third Quarter). Home Economics for Community Work. *South Pacific Bulletin*, pp.40-41.

Emberson-Bain, A. (1995). *Women in Development: Kiribati*. Asian Development Bank.

Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. (1999). Women's activism brings results. *Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Newsletter, 5*(1). Retrieved 15 January 2008 from: http://www.fijiwomen.com/index.php?id=1127&docinput%5Bdesign%5D=Printable

Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. (1996). Women give their views on the regional meeting. *Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Newsletter 2*(3). Retrieved 15 January 2008 from: http://www.fijiwomen.com/index.php?id=979&docinput%5Bdesign%5D=Printable

Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. (1999). Stages of women's awareness. *Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Newsletter 5*(1). Retrieved on 15 January 2008 from: http://www.fijiwomen.com/index.php?id=1127&docinput%5Bdesign%5D=Printable

Garcia, L. (2006). *Understanding civil society in Kiribati, Tuvalu and Vanuatu: A Pacific Skills Link Action research project* with financial assistance from the European Community.

Geddes, et al. (Eds.), (1982). *Islands on the line: Team report.* Canberra: The Australian National University.

Geissler, L. (1962, April). Youth Education Course in Western Samoa. *South Pacific Bulletin,* 58-59.

Goldberg, J. (1961, July). Pacific Islanders Study at New East-West Center. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 69.

Griffen, V. (1975, July). Pacific women's chance. *Pacific Islands Monthly*, p.8.

Griffen, V. (Ed.), (1976). *Pacific women speak out!: A report of the Pacific women's conference – October 27 – November 2*, Suva, Fiji.

Goodwillie, D. (1981). *Pre-school in the Pacific Islands: Report of the Pacific Pre-School Workshop held in Suva, Fiji, August 1980*. Unpublished Report.

Holland, B. (1961, January). New Interests for Aitutaki Women. *South Pacific Bulletin, 44*(62).

Hosie, B. P (1982)First Evaluation Women's Ring of Friendship, Republic of Kiribati, Period: October 14, 1981 – July 31, 1982. 'A program to assist women in development programs in Kiribati', New York: The Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific

Kamoriki, K (1976) *Women speak out! A report of the Pacific Women's Conference. October 27 – November 2, 1975.*

Kingstone, F. K. (1989) *Report on Social Development Advisory Services to the Government of the Republic of Kiribati, 4 – 17 March, 1989*, Port Villa, Vanuatu: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Pacific Operations Centre

Mair, (1976) *Women speak out! A report of the Pacific Women's Conference. October 27 – November 2, 1975.*

McBean, A. (1964, January). Handicrafts of the South Seas. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 54, 18-20.

McCarthy, J. K. (1961, October). In Papua New Guinea…New ways of learning for village people. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 42-43.

McCreary J. R., & Boardman D.W. (1968). *Some impressions of social change in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands: A report to the Resident Commissioner*. Department of Social Science, Victoria University of Wellington.

Namoori – Sinclair, R. (2000). *A baseline study on women's issues in Kiribati: a case study submitted for the SPC/PWRB Micronesian sub-regional meeting held in Tarawa, Kiribati.* Suva, Fiji: Funded by the Development Fund for International Development (DFID) Pacific.

Nast, K. F. (1982) Third Quarterly Report, Women's Ring of Friendship, Republic of Kiribati, Period: June1 – August 31, 1982. 'A program to assist women in development programs in Kiribati', New York: The Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific

Nu'ufou P. (2002). Report on duty travel to Kiribati, Annex 3: List of CETC Graduates, unpublished report.

Pacific Foundation for the Advancement of Women (PACFAW). (2004). *Kiribati's commitment to gender equity, equality and empowerment of women: CEDAW Implementation 2003*: Suva, Fiji: PACFAW with financial assistance from Bread for the World.

Price, N. (1964, January). Pandanus weaving. *South Pacific Bulletin*,*43*, 58.

Robertson, R. (1961, October). Fiji women find new interests. *South Pacific Bulletin*, *54-55*, 62.

Sayers, C. E. (1962, April). Looking back…Women playing an increasing part. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 26.

Schulz, W. G. (1969, First Quarter). GEIC handicrafts. *South Pacific Bulletin,*50-53.

Seddon, R. (1964a, January). New home economics training centre for South Pacific. *South Pacific Bulletin*. *31*, 58.

Seddon, R. (1964b, January). Adult education and community development. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 29–30.

Shinkawa, B. Y. (1966, Third Quarter). The East-West Center Hawaii. *South Pacific Bulletin,* 15–18.

Slatter, C. (1976). Forward. In *Women speak out! A report of the Pacific Women's Conference. October 27 – November 2, 1975,* pp i-v.

Stewart, M. (1960, April). Women's interests in the Pacific. *South Pacific Bulletin 43*, 46.

Stewart, M. (1962, January). Partners in Progress: An account of the SPC Women's Interests Seminar held recently in Western Samoa. *South Pacific Bulletin*, p 29

Stewart, M. (1966a, Third Quarter). Teaching kits – Gifts for community educators. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 53.

Stewart, M. (1966b, Fourth Quarter). Home economics students visit villages in Fiji. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 29.

South Pacific Commission. (1957). *Progress in the Pacific: Report of the South Pacific Commission for the year 1956*. Noumea, New Caledonia.

South Pacific Commission. (1958). *Progress in the Pacific: Report of the South Pacific Commission for the year 1957*. Noumea, New Caledonia.

South Pacific Commission. (1959). *Progress in the Pacific: Report of the South Pacific Commission for the year 1958*. Noumea, New Caledonia.

South Pacific Commission. (1960). *Progress in the Pacific: Report of the South Pacific Commission for the year 1959.* Noumea, New Caledonia.

South Pacific Commission. (1961). *Progress in the Pacific: Report of the South Pacific Commission for the year 1960*. Noumea, New Caledonia.

South Pacific Commission. (1962). *Progress in the Pacific: Report of the South Pacific Commission for the year 1961*. Noumea, New Caledonia.

South Pacific Commission. (1963). *Progress in the Pacific: Report of the South Pacific Commission for the year 1962*. Noumea, New Caledonia.

South Pacific Commission. (1964). *Progress in the Pacific: Report of the South Pacific Commission for the year 1963*. Noumea, New Caledonia.

South Pacific Commission. (1965). *Progress in the Pacific: Report of the South Pacific Commission for the year 1964*. Noumea, New Caledonia.

South Pacific Commission. (1969). *Annual Report of the South Pacific Commission September 1968 to August 1969*. Noumea, New Caledonia.

South Pacific Commission. (1970). *Annual Report of the South Pacific Commission September 1969 to August 1970*. Noumea, New Caledonia.

South Pacific Commission. (1995). *National Reviews of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women: Micronesia*. Noumea, New Caledonia.

Teiwaki, R. (2002), *The Women Interest Worker (WIW) in Kiribati*, NZODA GAD Project

Tekanene, K. (1961). Women's interests training seminar held at Apia, Western Samoa 29th August – 21st September 1961. Report by Nei Catherine Tekanene, Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony.

Tekanene, K. (1976). In *Women speak out! A report of the Pacific Women's Conference. October 27 – November 2, 1975*.

Tekanene, M (2004a). *Kiribati's Commitment to gender, equity, equality and empowerment: CEDAW implementation 2003*. Suva, Fiji: PACFAW.

Tekanene, M. (2004b). *Kiribati status of women 2003*. Suva, Fiji: PACFAW.

Tekanene, M. (2004c). *Kiribati's implementation of commitments to the Beijing and Pacific Platforms for action 2002-2003*, Suva, Fiji: PACFAW.

United Nations. (1991). *The status of women in Kiribati*. Country Overview Paper for the South Pacific Seminar on the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

United Nations. (2000). *Civil society organisations and United Nations Agencies in the Pacific: current collaboration and future options*. A Study Commissioned by United Nations Development Programme, Fiji.

Women's Club Handbook. (1961, April). *South Pacific Bulletin*, 72.

(1961, October). Women's interests seminar held in Western Samoa. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 29 -31.

(1962, January). Annual review of Commission's work- A report on the twenty-second session of the South Pacific Commission, held at Noumea from October 12-24. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 31 – 33.

(1962, January). Pacific reading. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 64-68.

(1962, July). The Fifth South Pacific Conference. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 20, 61.

(1963, January). SPC Work Programme for '63. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 33-35.

(1963, January). Pacific reading. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 69 – 70.

(1963, October). The work of the South Pacific Commission, July-September, 1963. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 50- 52.

(1963, October).Training course in home economics. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 52, 58.

(1964, January). Second home economics expert. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 37.

(1964, January). SPC work programme for 1964. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 38 -40.

(1964, January). The work of the South Pacific Commission, October –December, 1963. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 56 – 58.

(1964, April). The work of the South Pacific Commission, January –March, 1964. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 60-62.

(1964, April). Pacific reading. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 65.

(1965). Community welfare from a woman's point of view. *Colony Information Notes*, *47*, 4.

(1965). Family planning. *Colony Information Notes*, *46*, 3.

(1965). Mrs Tekanene blames the women*., Colony Information Notes*, *49*, 3.

(1966, First Quarter). The South Pacific Commission Community Education Training Centre. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 34 – 35.

(1966, Fourth Quarter). Pacific reading: Reprint – handbook for women's clubs. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 62.

(1966, Second Quarter). Third course in home]economics for community work. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 56 -57.

(1967, Second Quarter). Home economics for teachers. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 30-31.

(1967). News from the Outer Islands – Tamana. *Colony Information Notes*, *37*, 4.

(1967, First Quarter). Third home economics course. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 51.

(1968, 13 March). Increase of handicraft export. *Colony Information Notes*, 3.

(1968, Third Quarter). SPC community education training centre, Suva. *South Pacific Bulletin*, 22.

(1971, 21 January) Women's Interests in the Colony. *Colony Information Notes*, 5-6

(1971, 22 April) National Women's Conference. *Colony Information Notes*, 1971, 22 April, 1

(1972, 23 November) Two win a free trip to Fiji. *Atoll Pioneer*, 1

(1972, 7 December). A busy week in the Legislative Council. *Atoll Pioneer*, 4-5.

(1972, 12 October). Arorae Women's Club. *Atoll Pioneer*, 16.

(1972, 30 November). Legislative Council Meeting, Day-By-Day. *Atoll Pioneer*, 5, 12.

(1972, 14 December). Three Select Committees set up. *Atoll Pioneer*, 1.

(1973, 12 July). $100 Donation. *Atoll Pioneer,* 3.

(1973, 15 October) X is her choice. *Atoll Pioneer,* 6.

(1973, 6 December). Bill to aid children of broken homes. *Atoll Pioneer,* 8-9.

(1973, 9 August). Catholic Maneaba opened. *Atoll Pioneer*, 2.

(1973, 15 February) Pioneer comment: Safety on the roads – who cares? *Atoll Pioneer*, 4.

(1974, 7 March) Women's Clubs to give views. *Atoll Pioneer*, 2.

(1974, 28 March) Urban Electoral District Ballot Paper. Atoll Pioneer, 2.

(1974, 4 April). Courthouse at Arorae. *Atoll Pioneer*, 3.

(1975, 22 May). CM welcomes new speaker *Atoll Pioneer*, 6.

(1975, 29 May). Dengue fever. *Atoll Pioneer*, 6.

(1975, 29 May). Kill two birds at one throw. *Atoll Pioneer*, 17.

(1975, 29 May). The forgotten ones have problems. *Atoll Pioneer*, 4.

(1975, 29 May). News on private practitioners. *Atoll Pioneer*, 3.

(1975, 22 May). Political supplement: Report of the Legislative Council. *Atoll Pioneer,* 29.

(1975, 3 July). Women's page: The feeling that she had. *Atoll Pioneer*, 9.

(1975, 24 July). Women's page: What it is like to be first. *Atoll Pioneer*, 10.

(1975, 11 September). Members of House of Assembly, *Atoll Pioneer*, 11

(1976, 1 July). A helping hand from the women. *Atoll Pioneer*, 2

(1976, 26 July) *Atoll Pioneer*, p 105

(1977, 1 September) Life histories of 8 locals with awards, *Atoll Pioneer*, pp 6-7

(1978, 24 February). Governor's address. *Atoll Pioneer*, 4.

(1978*,* 30 March). MHA invited to maneaba opening. *Atoll Pioneer*, 1.

(1978, 10 May). Opening of Te Runga n aine at Abaiang. *Atoll Pioneer*, 8.

Kiribati National Archives – Ministry of Health and Welfare

Letter to Representatives of Participating Governments, Territorial Administrations and Governments Routine Distribution from Dr Frank Mahony, Acting Secretary General, 1 August 1975. (Unpublished manuscript)

Letter to Dr Frank Mahony, Acting Secretary General RE SPC Sub Regional Workshop from Secretary for Health and Welfare, 31 October, 1975. (Unpublished manuscript)

Note from Mrs Russell, Minister for Health and Welfare to the Secretary for Health and Welfare re: Letter to Mrs Russell, Minister of Health and Welfare from Miss McGreiger, General Secretary, ACWW, 3 December 1976. (Unpublished manuscript)

Letter to Miss H McGrieger, General Secretary of ACWW from Mrs Russell, Minister of Health and Welfare, 17 November 1976. (Unpublished manuscript)

Letter to Mrs Russell, Minister of Health and Welfare from Miss McGreiger, General Secretary, ACWW, 3 December 1976. (Unpublished manuscript)

Letter to the Minister, Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, Commonwealth Secretariat, from Secretary to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, 18 November 1976. (Unpublished manuscript)

Letter to Secretary for Health and Welfare from P. D. Snelson, Director, Education & Training, for Managing Director, Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC), Commonwealth Secretariat, 7 December 1976. (Unpublished manuscript)

Letter to His Excellency the Governor from Secretary to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, Governor's Office RE: Constitutional Convention, 8 November 1976. (Unpublished manuscript) (Unpublished manuscript)

Letter from Governor's Office to Secretary to Minister Health and Welfare, 24 November 1976. (Unpublished manuscript)

Letter to Mr John Pritchard, Senior Assistant Secretary, Division of Community Officers Affairs, Ministry of Health and Welfare from Mr Lester James, Specialist in Out-of-School, Youth Education, South Pacific Commission, 19 November 1976. (Unpublished manuscript)

Tour of Beru Report, 1974, Women's Interests Office, Ministry of Health and Welfare (Unpublished manuscript)

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Anon.

Baiteke, I. (personal communication, May 22, 2007)

Baati Binoka, T. (personal communication, April, 6, 2009)

Goodwillie, D (personal communication via email, May 12, 2008)

Kauongo, Sr. K (personal communication March 9, 2008).

Nabatiku, K. (personal communication March 17, 2008).

Rautu, Sister F. (personal communication, March 20, 2008) (trans. Sr. Alaima Talu)

Russell, T. (personal communication May 23, 2007)

Tekanene, K (personal communication, April 4, 2008).

Tira, R. (personal communication, March 31, 2009)

Williams, A. (personal communication March 12, 2008) (trans Sr. Alaima Talu)

SECONDARY SOURCES

Avalos, B. (1995). Women and development. *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, *10*(1), 73-83.

Bennet, B. (1994), Holland, Britain, and Germany in Melanesia, In Howe, K., Kiste, R., & Lal, B. V. (Eds.), *Tides of history: The Pacific Islands in the twentieth century*. (pp. 40 – 70) Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Bennet, J. (2006). *History matters: Patriarchy and the challenge of feminism.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.

Beteta, H. C. (2006). What is missing in measures of women's empowerment?.*Journal of Human Development*, *7*(2), 221-241.

Bingham, H. (1908). *A Gilbertese-English dictionary*. Reprinted with the consent of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1953). Massachusetts: Kiribati Protestant Church.

Brewis, A. (1996). *Lives on the line: Women and ecology on a Pacific atoll.* London: Harcourt Brace.

Borofsky, R. (Ed). (2000). *Remembrance of Pacific pasts: An invitation to remake history.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Burnett, G. (2005). Language games and schooling: Discourses of colonialism in Kiribati education. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 25*(1), 93-106.

Campbell, I. C. (1990). *A history of the Pacific islands*. California: University of California Press.

Cockerton, C. (1999). Women. In M. Rapaport (Ed.), *The Pacific Islands: Environment and society* (pp.305 – 314). Bess Press.

Colbert, E. S. (1997). *The Pacific Islands: Paths to the present*. Westview Press.

Cole, R. V., et. al., (1985) *Women in development of the South Pacific: Barriers and Opportunities.* Canberra: Development Studies, The Australian National University.

Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

Cordon, R. (1996). *Seven years island hopping volume 1*. Lincolnshire: Cordon and Wood Eagle.

Cordon, R. (1998). *Seven years island hopping volume 2*. Lincolnshire: Cordon and Wood Eagle.

Cotterill, P. (1992). Interviewing women: Issues of friendship, vulnerability and power. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *15*(5/6), 593-606.

Crocombe, M. T. (n.d. c.1900). Women at the University of the South Pacific, *Pacific Perspectives*, *2*(2), 24-28.

Crocombe, R. (1992). The future of democracy in the Pacific Islands. In R. Crocombe (Ed.), *Culture and democracy in the South Pacific* (pp.9-27). Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

Crocombe, R. & Ali, A. (1983). *Politics in Micronesia.* Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

Daley, C. & Nolan, M. (Eds.), (1994). *Suffrage and beyond: International feminist perspectives.* Auckland: Auckland University Press.

de Ishtar, Z. (1994) *Daughters of the Pacific*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

de Ishtar, Z. (2005). Striving for a common language: A white feminist parallel to Indigenous ways of knowing and researching. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *28*, 357 – 368.

Denoon, D. (Ed.), (1997). *Emerging from Empire? Decolonisation in the Pacific.* Proceedings of a workshop at the Australian National University, December 1996, Canberra: Division of Pacific and Asian History, Australian National University.

Denoon, D., & Meleisea, M. (2004). *The Cambridge history of the Pacific Islanders*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Deverell, G. (n.d. c. 1980). What are Pacific Church Women talking about? *Pacific Perspectives*, *2*(2), 68 - 70.

Dickson-Waiko, A. (2003). The missing rib: Mobilizing church women for change in Papua New Guinea. In B. Douglas (Ed.), *Women's Groups and Everyday Modernity in Melanesia,* Special Issue. *Oceania, 74*, 98 – 119.

Dickson-Waiko, A. (2006). Reflections on the women and development agenda in Papua New Guinea. *Development Bulletin: Building Better Pacific Economies*, *70*, April, 96 – 99.

Dillard, C. B. (2000). The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen: Examining an endarkened feminist epistemology in educational research and leadership. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 13*(6), 661-681.

Douglas, B. (2002a). Women and negotiations of modernity in Vanuatu. *The Contemporary Pacific*, *12*(1), 1-38.

Douglas, B. (2002b). Why religion, race, and gender matter in Pacific politics. *Development Bulletin, 59*, October, 11 -14.

Douglas, B. (2003a). Prologue. In B. Douglas (Ed.), *Women's groups and everyday modernity in Melanesia,* Special Issue. *Oceania, 74*, 1- 5.

Douglas, B. (2003b). Christianity, tradition, and everyday modernity: towards an anatomy of women's groupings in Melanesia. In B. Douglas (Ed.), *Women's Groups and Everyday Modernity in Melanesia,* Special Issue. *Oceania, 74*, 6 – 23.

Drage, J. (1994). The exception, not the rule: women's political activities in Pacific Island countries. *New Politics in the South Pacific.* Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

Dubois, E. (2000). Woman's suffrage: The view from the Pacific. *The Pacific Historical Review*, *69*(4), 539-551.

Dusak Sexton, L. (1993). Pigs, pearlshells and 'women's work': collective responses to change in Highland Papua New Guinea. In V. Lockwood, T. Harding and B. Wallace (Eds.), *Contemporary Pacific Societies: Studies in Development and Change* (pp. 117 – 134). London: Prentice-Hall International.

Eastman, Rev. G. H. (1948). *An English-Gilbertese vocabulary of the most commonly used words, Reprinted by Kiribati Protestant Church.* (2004). Tarawa: Kiribati Protestant Church Levett Print.

Edwards, R. (1990). Connecting method and epistemology: A white woman interviewing black women. *Women's Studies International Forum, 13*(5), 477-490.

Etekiera, K. (1979). Te Aro, The New Religion. In Talu, Sister Alaima et. al. (Ed.), *Kiribati: Aspects of history* (pp. 38-43). Tarawa: Ministry of Education, Training and Culture.

Emberson, F. (1975). Make love, not babies: The role of family planning in development. In S. Tupouniua, R. Crocombe and C. Slatter (Eds.), *The Pacific way* (pp.160 – 163). Suva, Fiji: South Pacific Social Sciences Association.

Emberson-Bain, 'A. (Ed.), (1994). *Sustainable development or malignant growth?: Perspectives of Pacific Island women*. Suva: Marama Publications.

Eriksen, A. (2005). The gender of the church: Conflicts and social wholes on Ambrym. *Oceania*, *75*, 284 – 300.

Everi, K. (2003). Kiribati beckons. In Teingiia, Tereeao, Rokete, Teewata, Crowl, Linda, South Pacific Creative Arts Society. *Mana: Kiribati Special: A South Pacific Journal of Art and Culture, Language and Literature*. *13*(2), p 11

Finau, P. (1975). Prayer, persuasion and politics. In S. Tupouniua, R. Crocombe and C. Slatter (Eds.), *The Pacific way* (pp. 165 – 175). Suva, Fiji: South Pacific Social Sciences Association.

Fife, W. (2005). *Doing fieldwork: Ethnographic methods for research in developing countries and beyond*. New York; Palgrave Macmillan.

Firth, S. (2000). Decolonization. In R. Borofsky (Ed.), *Remembrance of Pacific pasts: An invitation to remake history* (pp.314 – 332). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Fischer, S. R. (2002). *A history of the Pacific Islands*. Palgrave.

Forman, C. (1982). *The island churches of the South Pacific: Emergence in the twentieth centur*y. New York: Orbis Books.

Forman, C. (1987). 'Sing to the Lord a New Song': Women in the Churches of Oceania. In D. O'Brien and S. W. Tiffany (Eds.), *Rethinking women's roles: Perspectives from the Pacific* (pp.153-172). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Forman, C (Ed) (1992) *Island Churches: Challenge and Change*. Suva, Fiji: Pacific Theological College

Fraser, A. S. (1987). *The U.N. decade for women: Documents and dialogue.* Boulder & London: Westview Press.

Furau C. and Salevouris M. J. (Eds.), (2000). *The methods and skills of history: A practical guide* (2nd ed.). Wheeling: Harlan Davidson Inc.

Garrett, J. (1997) *Where nets were cast: Christianity in Oceania since World War II*. Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

George, N. (2008). 'Situating' active citizenship: Historical and contemporary perspectivesof women's organising in the Pacific. *Development In Practice, 19*(8), 981-996.

George, N. (2002). Women's re-visions of globalisation: 'Level playing field' or 'uphill battle'? *International Feminist Journal of Politics, 4*(2), 268-77.

Gilkes, B. (2009). *The lion and the frigate bird*. Published in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the RMIT University: Melbourne.

Gilson, R. (1980). *The Cook Islands, 1820 -1950.* Victoria University Press in association with the Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific.

Gorodey, D. (2004) *The Kanak Apple Season: selected short fiction of Dewe Gorodey* Canberra: Pandanus Books.

Griffen, V. (1984). The Pacific Women's Movement. In R. Morgan (Ed.), *Sisterhood is global: The International Women's Movement anthology*. (pp 517-524) New York: Doubleday.

Griffen, V. (Ed.), with Yee Joan. (1989). *Women, development and empowerment: A Pacific feminist perspective*. A report of the Pacific Women's Workshop, Naboutini, Fiji, 23-26 March, 1987. Kuala Lumpur: Asian and Pacific Development Centre.

Griffen, V. (2006). Local and global women's rights in the Pacific. *Development, 49*(1), 108-112.

Grimble, A. (1952). *A pattern of islands*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Grimble, A. (1957). *Return to the islands*. London: John Murray.

Grimble, A. (1989). *Tungaru traditions: Writing on the atoll culture of the Gilbert Islands*. In H. E. Maude (Ed.). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Hau'ofa, E. (1994). Our Sea of Islands. In *The contemporary Pacific* (pp. 147-160).

Hereniko, V. (1994). Representations of cultural identities. In K. Howe, R. Kiste & B. V. Lal (Eds.), *Tides of history: The Pacific Islands in the twentieth century* (pp. 406-434). Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press.

Hereniko, V. (1999). Representations of cultural identities. In V. Hereniko & R. Wilson (Eds.), *Inside out: Literature, cultural politics, and identity in the New Pacific* (pp .137-165). Lanham, MD Rowman and Littlefield.

Hereniko, V. & Wilson, R. (Eds.), (1999). *Inside out: Literature, cultural politics, and identity in the New Pacific.* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Hermkens, A. (2005). Gendered Objects. *The Journal of Pacific History*, *40*(2), 1-20.

Herr, R. A., (1994), Regionalism and nationalism In Howe, K., Kiste, R., & Lal, B. V. (Eds.), *Tides of history: The Pacific Islands in the twentieth century*. (pp 283-299) Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, p 285

Hezel, F. (1992). Recolonising islands and decolonising history. In D. H. Rubinstein (Ed.), *Pacific History: Papers from the 8th Pacific History Association Conference.* Guam: University of Guam Press and Micronesian Area Research Centre.

hooks, bell. (2004). Culture to culture: Ethnography and cultural studies as critical intervention. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Approaches to qualitative research: a reader in theory and practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hooper, P. (1976). Feminism in the Pacific: The Pan-Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association. *The Pacific Historian*, Winter, 367 -378.

Howe, K., Kiste, R., & Lal, B. V. (Eds.), (1994) *Tides of history: The Pacific Islands in the twentieth century*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Hughes, H. (1985), Women in development of the South Pacific In Cole, R. V., et. al., (1985) *Women in development of the South Pacific: Barriers and Opportunities,* (pp. 3-10) Canberra: Development Studies, The Australian National University.

Humphries, B., Mertens, D. M., & Truman, C. (2000). Arguments for an 'emancipatory' research paradigm. In B. Humphries, D. M. Mertens & C. Truman (Eds.), *Research and Inequality* (pp. 3-23). London: UCL Press.

Ieuti, T (1992) The Kiribati Protestant Church. In Charles Forman (Ed) *Island Churches: Challenge and Change*. Suva, Fiji: Pacific Theological College

Itaia, M. (1979). Rebirth: Te Mauri, Te Raoi, ao Te Tabomoa. In Sister Alaima Talu et. al. *Kiribati: Aspects of history* (pp. 121-128). Tarawa: Ministry of Education, Training and Culture.

Jivan, V., & Forster, C. (2006). *Translating CEDAW into LAW: CEDAW legislative compliance in nine Pacific Islands countries.* Suva, Fiji: United Nations Development

Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Pacific Regional Office and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pacific Centre.

Johnson-Odim, C. (1991). Common themes, different contexts: Third world women and feminism. In C. T. Mohanty et. al. (Eds.), *Third world women and the politics of feminism* (pp. 314-327). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Jolly, M., & Macintyre, M. (Eds.), (1989). *Family and gender in the Pacific: Domestic contradictions and the colonial impact*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jolly, M. (1993). *Women of the place: Kastom, colonialism and gender in Vanuatu.* Camberwell, Vic.: Harwood Academic Publishers.

Jolly, M. (2003). Epilogue. In B. Douglas (Ed.), *Women's groups and everyday modernity in Melanesia,* Special Issue. *Oceania, 74*, 134-147.

Jolly, M. (2005). Beyond the horizon? Nationalisms, feminisms, and globalization in the Pacific. *Ethnohistory, 52*(1), 137 – 166.

Jordanova, L. (2000). *History in practice*. London: Hodder Headline Group.

Karl, M. (1995). *Women and empowerment: Participation and decision making.* London: Zed Books.

Keating, M. & Melville, L. (1986), Aid and Development Issues in the Pacific, In Nesbit, J., et. al. *Development in the Pacific: What Women Say*, (pp. 69-78), Canberra: A Development Dossier, Australian Council for Overseas Aid.

Keesing, R. (1989) Creating the Past: Custom and identity in the Contemporary Pacific, *The Contemporary Pacific,* 1 (1), 19 – 42.

Kirata, B. (1985). Spiritual Beliefs. In B. T. Bataua et. al. *Kiribati: A changing atoll culture* (pp. 76-84) . Tarawa: Ministry of Education.

Kleinberg S. J. (Ed.), (1998). *Retrieving women's history: Changing perceptions of the role of women in politics and society.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Koae, T. (1993). Corrupt and illegal electoral practices. In H. van Trease (Ed.), *Atoll politics: The Republic of Kiribati* (pp. 105-111). Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies. .

Koch, G. (1986). *The material culture of Kiribati*. English Translation by Guy Slatter. Suva: IPS, University of the South Pacific.

Kutimeni Tenten, M. (2003). The relationship between Katekateka and women's ordination in the Kiribati Protestant Church. In L. Johnson & A. Filemoni-Tofaeono (Eds.), *Weavings: Women doing theology in Oceania*. Suva, Fiji: South Pacific Association of Theological Schools and University of the South Pacific.

Kwain Sue, M. (n.d. c.1980). Community Education Training Centre (CETC). *Pacific Perspectives*, *2*(2), 62–64.

Lacey, R. (1997). Whose voices are heard? Oral history and the decolonisation of history. In D. Denoon (Ed.), *Emerging from Empire? Decolonisation in the Pacific* (pp. 180- 186). Proceedings of a workshop at the Australian National University, December 1996.

Langi, J (1992) The History of the Methodist Church in its Rotuman Setting. In Charles Forman (Ed) *Island Churches: Challenge and Change*. Suva, Fiji: Pacific Theological College

Lal, Brij V. & Hempenstall, P. (Eds.), (2001). *Pacific lives, Pacific places: Bursting boundaries in Pacific history.* Canberra: Australian National University.

Lal, B. V., & Nelson, H. (Eds.), (1995). *Lines across the sea: colonial inheritance in the post-colonial Pacific*. Pacific History Association.

Lawrence, R. (1992). Kiribati: Change and context in an atoll world. In A. Robillard (Ed.), *Social change in the Pacific Islands* (pp. 264 – 299). London: Kegan Paul International.

Lawson, M. E. (1989). Tradition, change and meaning in Kiribati performance: An ethnography of music and dance in a Micronesian society. PhD Thesis, Brown University.

Linnekin, J., & Power, L. (Eds.), (1990). *Cultural identity and ethnicity in the Pacific.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Loomba, A. (1998). *Colonialism/postcolonialism*. London: Routledge.

Macdonald, B. (1982). *Cinderellas of the Empire: Towards a history of Kiribati and Tuvalu.* Canberra: Australian National University Press.

Macdonald, B. (1994) Britain In Howe, K., Kiste, R., & Lal, B. V. (Eds.), *Tides of history: The Pacific Islands in the twentieth century*. (pp. 170 – 194) Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Macintyre, M. (2003). Petstorme women: Responding to change in Lihir, Papua New Guinea. In B. Douglas (Ed.), *Women's groups and everyday modernity in Melanesia,* Special Issue. *Oceania, 74*, 120 – 133.

Manaima, R. B. (1988). *A reflection on the role of women in the Kiribati context in relation to culture: A project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Divinity Degree*. Pacific Theological College, Suva, Fiji.

Malinowski, B. (1929). *The sexual life of savages in North-Western Melanesia; An ethnographic account of courtship, marriage and family life among the natives of the Trobriand Islands, British New Guinea*. London: Routledge.

Maude, H (1977)'Foreward' In Ernest Sabatier *Astride the equator: An account of the Gilbert Islands.* Trans Ursula Nixon, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp v - viii

Marshall, S. (1996). For the betterment of the family: Women and empowerment in Kiribati. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

Marshall, S. (1985). Development, dependence and gender inequality in the third world. *International Studies Quarterly*, *29*, 217-240.

Matsuda, M. (2012). Pacific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples, and Cultures. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Maude, H. C. & H. E. (1994). *An anthology of Gilbertese oral tradition*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific.

McClintok, A. (1992). The angels of progress: Pitfalls of the term 'post-Colonialism'. *Social Text*, *10*(31-32), 84-98.

McCreary, J. (1975). Activist or conservator? The role of the social worker. In Sione Tupouniua, Ron Crocombe and Claire Slatter (Eds.), *The Pacific Way* (pp. 152 – 156). Suva, Fiji: South Pacific Social Sciences Association.

McDougall, D. (2003). Fellowship and citizenship as models of national community: United Church women's fellowships in Ranongga, Solomon Islands. In Bronwen Douglas (Ed.), *Women's groups and everyday modernity in Melanesia.* Special Issue, *Oceania, 74*, 61 – 80.

McLeod, A. (2002). Where are the women in Simbu politics? *Development Bulletin*, *59*, 43-46.

Mead, M. (1929). *Coming of age in Samoa: A psychological study of primitive youth for western civilization*. London: Cape.

Molisa, G. (1978). The traditional status of women in the New Hebrides. *Vanuaaku Viewpoints.* Vila: Vanuaaku Pati.

Molisa, G. M. (1985), Vanuatu's women's development since independence In Cole, R. V., et. al., *Women in development of the South Pacific: Barriers and Opportunities,* (pp. 215-218) Canberra: Development Studies, The Australian National University.

Morgan, R. (1984). Planetary feminism: The politics of the 21st century. In R. Morgan (Ed.), *Sisterhood is global: The International Women's Movement anthology* (pp. 1-37). New York: Doubleday.

Moser, C. (1993). *Gender planning and development: Theory, practice and training.* London: Routledge.

Namai, B. (1987). The evolution of Kiribati tenures. In R. Crocombe (Ed.), *Land tenure in the atolls: Cook Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Tokelau, Tuvalu* (pp. 30-39). Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific.

Neemia, U. F. (1981). Local government and local culture: Fitting them together in Kiribati. *Pacific Perspective*, *10*(1), 62-64.

Neemia, U. F. (1992). Decolonization and democracy in the South Pacific. In R. Crocombe (Ed.), *Culture and Democracy in the South Pacific* (pp 1-8). Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

Nesbit, J., et. al. (1986a) *Development in the Pacific: What Women Say*, Canberra: A Development Dossier, Australian Council for Overseas Aid

Nesbit, J., et. al., (1986b), Introduction, In Nesbit, J., et. al. *Development in the Pacific: What Women Say*, (pp. iv – v), Canberra: A Development Dossier, Australian Council for Overseas Aid.

Ngaebi, T et. al. (1993). The status of women. In H. van Trease (Ed.), *Atoll politics: The Republic of Kiribati* (pp. 266-269). Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury.

O'Brien, D., & Tiffany, S. W. (Eds.), (1984). *Rethinking women's roles: Perspectives from the Pacific.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

O'Reilly, K. (2005). *Ethnographic methods.* London: Routledge.

Paini, A. (2003). 'The kite is tied to you': Custom, Christianity, and organization among Kanak Women of Drueulul, Lifou, New Caledonia. In B. Douglas (Ed.), *Women's groups and everyday modernity in Melanesia.* Special Issue, *Oceania, 74*, 81-97.

Paisley, F. (2002). Cultivating modernity*. Journal of Women's History*, *14*(3), 105-132.

Pietila, H., and Vickers, J. (1990). *Making women matter: The role of the United Nations*. London: Zed Books.

Pond Eyley, C., & White, R. (1987). *Twenty-eight days in Kiribati.* Auckland: New Women's Press.

Pollard A. A. (2003) Women's organizations, voluntarism, and self-financing in Solomon Islands: a participant perspective. In B. Douglas (Ed.), *Women's groups and everyday modernity in Melanesia.* Special Issue, *Oceania, 74*, pp 44-60.

Ralston, C. (1990). Pacific Island women in the context of Pacific cultures, Christian theologies and modernisation. *South Pacific Journal of Mission Studies*, *11*(2), 4-6.

Ralston, C. (1992). The study of women in the Pacific. *The Contemporary Pacific*, Spring, 162-175.

Ram, K, & Jolly, M. (Ed.), (1998). *Maternities and modernities: Colonial and postcolonial experiences in Asia and the Pacific*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ram, K, & Jolly, M. (Eds.), (2001). *Borders of being: Citizenship, fertility, and sexuality in Asia and the Pacific.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Rodman, M. (2004). Traveling stories, colonial intimacies, and women's histories in Vanuatu. *The Contemporary Pacific*, *16*(2), 233-257.

Rooney, N. (1975). What's a fair go for women? In S. Tupouniua, R. Crocombe & C. Slatter (Eds.), *The Pacific way* (pp. 119 – 121). Suva, Fiji: South Pacific Social Sciences Association.

Rose, S. (2005). *The role of literature in the decolonisation process in the South Pacific: case study of the short fiction of Kanak author Dewey Gorodey of New Caledonia* (Unpublished Honour's Thesis). Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Ryen, A. (2000). Colonial methodology? Methodological challenges to cross-cultural projects. In B. Humphries, D. M. Mertens and C. Truman (Eds.), *Research and inequality* (pp. 220-235). London: UCL Press.

Sabatier, E. (1977). *Astride the equator: An account of the Gilbert Islands.* Trans Ursula Nixon, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Scheyvens, R. (2003). Church groups and the empowerment of women in Solomon Islands. In B. Douglas (Ed.), *Women's groups and everyday modernity in Melanesia.* Special Issue, *Oceania, 74*, 24-43.

Schoeffel Meleisea, P. (n.d. c.1980). Women's associations and rural development: Western Samoa and East New Britain. *Pacific Perspectives*, *2*(2), 56-61.

Schoeffel Meleisea, P. (1986). The rice pudding syndrome: Women's advancement and home economics training in the South Pacific. In Nesbit, J., et. al. *Development in the Pacific: What Women Say*, (pp. 36-44), Canberra: A Development Dossier, Australian Council for Overseas Aid.

Schoeffel Meleisea, P. (1994). Women and political leadership in the Pacific Islands. In C. Daley & M. Nolan (Eds.), *Suffrage and beyond: International feminist perspectives* (pp. 107-123). Auckland: Auckland University Press.

Secretariat of the Pacific Community. (2000). *Joint SPC/Government of Kiribati Sub-Regional Micronesian Meeting*. Tarawa, Kiribati, 9-11 March.

Sewell, B. (1976). *Butaritari report: Rural socio-economic survey of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands.* Wellington, New Zealand: Victoria University of Wellington.

Sigrah, K. R., &. King, S. M. (2001), *Te rii ni Banaba*, Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific

Sinclair, K. (1986). Women in Oceania in M. I. Duley and M. I. Edwards (Eds.), *The cross-cultural study of women* (pp. 271-289). New York: Feminist Press.

Sirivi, J. T., & Havini, M. T. (2004). *As Mothers of the Land: The Birth of the Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom*. Pandanus Books.

Siwatibau, S. (1985). Women's access to aid sponsored training in the South Pacific. In Cole, R. V., et. al., (1985) *Women in development of the South Pacific: Barriers and Opportunities.* (pp 88-104) Canberra: Development Studies, The Australian National University.

Smith Foster, F. (2007). The personal is political, the past has potential, and other thoughts on studying women's literature – then and now. *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 26*(1), pp. 29-38.

Strathern, M. (1972). *Women in between: Female roles in a male world, Mt. Hagen, New Guinea.* London: Seminar Press.

Suzack, C. (et. al) (Eds.), (2012). *Indigenous women and feminism: politics, activism, culture.* Vancouver: UBC Press.

Tabokai, N. (1993). The Maneaba System. In H. van Trease (Ed.), *Atoll politics: The Republic of Kiribati* (pp.23-29). Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies.

Tagoilelagi, I. (n.d. c.1980). The Pacific pre-schools. *Pacific Perspectives*, *2*(2), 33 – 35.

Talu, Sister A et. al. (1979). *Kiribati: Aspects of history*. Tarawa: Ministry of Education, Training and Culture.

Talu, Sister A. (et al.). (1985) *Kiribati: A changing Atoll culture*. Tarawa: Ministry of Education.

Talu, Sister A., & Tekonnang, F. (1979). Fertilisation: Development and social change. In A. Talu et al (Eds.), *Kiribati: Aspects of history* (pp. 98-111). Tarawa: Ministry of Education, Training and Culture.

Talu, Sister A. (1985). Being I-Kiribati. In Talu, Sister A. (et al.). *Kiribati: A changing Atoll culture* (pp. 2-15). Tarawa: Ministry of Education.

Talu, Sister A. (1992). The role of women in the development of Kiribati. In D. H. Rubinstein (Ed.), *Pacific history: Papers from the 8th Pacific History Association Conference* (pp. 177-182). Guam: University of Guam Press and Micronesian Area Research Centre.

Teaiwa, T. (1994). Bikinis and Other S/Pacific N/oceans. *The Contemporary Pacific, 6*, 87-109

Teaeroi, T. (2004). *Waa in Storms.* Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

Teiwaki, R. (1980). The future of Kiribati culture. *Pacific Perspectives, 19*(1), 6-12.

Teiwaki, R. (1982). Kiribati: Nation of water. In R. Crocombe and A. Ali (Eds.), *Politics in Micronesia* (pp. 2-37). Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific.

Teiwaki, R. (1985). Leadership in the Village. In B. T. Bataua et. al. *Kiribati: A hanging Atoll culture* (pp. 168-179). Tarawa: Ministry of Education.

Teingiia, T., Rokete, T., & Crowl, L., (2003). *Mana: Kiribati Special: A South Pacific Journal of Art and Culture, Language and Literature,* 13(2). Suva, Fiji: South Pacific Creative Arts Society and Mana Publications, p 34

Thomas, P. (1986), 'Women and Development – A Two-edged Sword', In Nesbit, J., et. al. *Development in the Pacific: What Women Say*, (pp. 1-17), Canberra: A Development Dossier, Australian Council for Overseas Aid.

Thomas, N. (2010). *Islanders: The Pacific in the age of empire*. Yale: Yale University Press.

Tiffany, S. W. (1987). Politics and gender in Pacific Island societies: A feminist critique of the anthropology of power. *Women's Studies*, *13*, 333-355.

Tira, R. T. (1985) Mothers and Infants. In Sister A. Talu. (et al.). *Kiribati: A changing Atoll culture* (pp. 17-26). Tarawa: Ministry of Education.

Tito, K., et al. (1979). Tradition: Ancient Gilbertese society. In Sister A. T. et al. *Kiribati: Aspects of history* (pp. 12-28). Tarawa: Ministry of Education, Training and Culture.

Tongamoa, T. (1988). *Pacific women: Roles and status of women in Pacific societies.* Suva: IPS, University of the South Pacific.

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Dunedin: University of Otago Press.

Tusitala Marsh, S. (1999a). Migrating feminisms: maligned overstayer or model citizen?, *Women's Studies International Forum, 21* (6), 665- 680.

Tusitala March, S. (1999b). Here our words. In M. Rapaport (Ed.), *The Pacific Islands: Environment and society* (pp.166-177). Bess Press.

Trask, H-K. (1996). Feminism and indigenous Hawaiian nationalism. *Signs, 21*(4), 906-916.

United Nations. (1985). *Forward looking strategies for the advancement of women*. Nairobi: United Nations.

Uriam, K. (1995) *In their own words: history and society in Gilbertese oral tradition.* Canberra: The Journal of Pacific History

van Trease, H. (Ed.), (1993). *Atoll politics: The Republic of Kiribati.* Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury.

van Trease, H. (Ed.). (1993a). From colony to independence. In H. van Trease (Ed.), *Atoll politics: The Republic of Kiribati* (pp.3-22). Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies..

van Trease, H. (Ed.), (1993b). The General Election. In H. van Trease (Ed.), *Atoll politics: The Republic of Kiribati* (pp.77-90). Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies.

Walker, (2003). Colonising research: academia's structural violence towards Indigenous Peoples. *Social Alternatives*, *2*(3), 37-40.

Weber-Pillwax, C. (2001). What is indigenous research? *Canadian Journal of Native Education, 25*(2), 166-174.

Wiesner-Hanks, M. (2001). *Gender in history*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Wesley-Smith, T. (1995). Rethinking Pacific Islands studies. *Pacific Studies*. *18*(2), 115-137.

Women of Vanuatu. (n.d. c.1980). Integration of women in the development process. *Pacific Perspectives, 2*(2), 1-4.

IMAGES AND MAPS

‘Map of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands’ (n.d.) Retrieved March 14, 2013 from http://brcstamps.com/catalog/countries/Gilbert_and_Ellice_Islands/GEIC_Map_1.html

Note: Unless otherwise attributed, all photographs were taken by the author.